

A MANDATE FOR GENDER INCLUSION:
BARRIERS TO GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAM

By

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

As a Muslim clergy within the City of New York, I have observed the age-old negative behaviors of gender inequality in sacred spaces (Masjids) and how worshippers practice gender inequality and other superstitions as opposed to acts of kindness and mutual respect as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This demonstration project created a Public Awareness Campaign on the topic of gender inequality which is an antecedent to various other forms of abuse.

The paper details the evolution of women and Islam, their status—both historic and contemporary, and the path to Domestic Violence. A series of presentations within the American Islamic community hopes to bring attention to the scourge of Domestic Violence and the wherewithal to both recognize its sinister power and begin understanding and healing within the community.

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CHAPTER 1

AL HAMDULILLAH

The Mosque was founded 20 years ago by Imam Bilal in the South Jamaica area of Queens. It is situated on a block that has a grocery store, apartment buildings and a martial arts school on the opposite end of the block. Across the street is a low income project that is plagued by drugs, prostitution, drug dealing and youth unemployment. The Mosque is a storefront Mosque – small, but with warm intimate social interactions where everyone knows each other as opposed to some of the big mosques where one is just another stranger in the crowd and there is no social interaction to speak of. The name of the Mosque is *Al Hamdulillah* (The Praise Belongs to God); they invite the community in when they have events and feed the people wholesome food (halal). The response is positive and many of the people ask questions about diet, health, religion and other issues that may be of concern. The Imam has run for City Council twice; but after 9/11 it is difficult for Muslims to be in the public-eye without suspicion, distrust and animosity.¹ The Mosque is a member of the “Majlis Ash-Shura,” the leadership council of New York City; it is composed of African American, Guyanese and Pakistani Mosques that interact on holidays, civil protests, and educational trainings but do not visit each other’s homes or rarely intermarry.

¹ Zahid H. Bukhair, Sulayman S. Hyang, Muntaz Ahmad and John L. Esposito, *Muslims’ Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004).

We all believe that:

Allah is God (The One and Only)
Allah the Eternal, Absolute
God begets not nor is God begotten
And there is none like unto God (Surah 112, Quran)

The Mosque provides the following ceremonies according to the *Sunnah* (Traditions) of the Prophet (PBUH) and the law: marriage, birth, burial (*Janaaza*) rituals, counseling, educational programs, holiday observances, picnics, school for children, etc. This is all supported by the members through *sadaqa* (alms) giving. They are in the process of developing a television show to be broadcasted locally. Presently they are renovating the Mosque: updating the electrical wiring to sustain larger air conditioners, provide more lighting and improve the functioning of the toilets. They have placed new rugs throughout the building on all floors and replaced the drywall. This work continues. They hope to have a presentable place and invite other faith leaders and politicians to speak at the Mosque.

Masjid Al Hamdulillah is a primarily an African American institution that provides for fifty families and others who may need to pray in that area. Friday *Jummah* serves approximately one hundred women and men.

It is open throughout the week and observes the five daily prayers. Women who could not obtain divorces from other Masjids seek out the leadership here because there is support for women on some issues that other Masjids are reluctant to get involved in. To get married both parties must have an AIDS/HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) tests. Although some men balked, many women appreciated being supported where women may feel awkward approaching men in reference to these issues. There is one *Jummah* service during Friday prayers, but two prayers for the *Eid*

(festivals) celebrations, one early in the morning and a later prayer at 9 A.M. with a short *khutba* (sermon) presented at each of these.

The Mosque has led the way for HIV/AIDS education because of the plague of those diseases in this community; we stepped out of our religious dogmatic role and taught Muslims and the community about safe sex and other risky behaviors despite the objections of the rigidly held opinions of some Muslims. We were able to reach where city agencies were unable to and our credibility added to our ability to reach the people. We provided many AIDS educational programs. The “Department of Health of The State of New York” heard of our work and attended one of our interfaith presentations on “Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Substance Abuse” and recommended us to the City Council for funding; we received a small grant to support our work in this community

That grant was terminated without notice; the residual backlash that American Muslims are subjected to as a result of 9/11; however, by the grace of God we were able to sustain our outreach and services. Since we are small in number, the termination of our grant put a huge dent in our budget; but we manage to continue our services in a community that has been devastated by drugs, disease and remains underserved.

They have a school for the children that teach the fundamentals of Islam, recitation of *Quran*, writing and reading Arabic, tutoring in math and reading. They are building a seniors’ emergency food pantry that in case of any emergency they will be able to provide sundry items.

The Masjid is predominately African American; with Africans and Pakistanis that pray there on Fridays for *Jummah* services. No African or Pakistani women attend; the women are all African American. This is due to the deep racial and cultural divide that is

a part of Muslims' behavior—except at public functions where etiquette demands that we behave as one.

They do have visiting Imams from other Masjids deliver the *khutba* as invited *khatibs* (religious speakers); this adds religious diversity and insight into meaning and understanding of the *Quran*. Most of these sermons reflect the conservative, patriarchal point of view; usually women are not allowed to give *khutbahs* (sermons) and there is no forum where women can present their theological knowledge on a regular basis. Women scholars, such as Amina Wadud, have taken to the pen to remind many Muslims of the statements in the *Quran* and that one of the acts of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the liberation of women in a super-patriarchal society; this was very risky because many of the men were not open to social change nor were they ecstatic about losing a major source of income by devouring women's inheritance.² Women's inheritance was devoured by their husbands, male relatives or male tribal members (in that order).

² Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

CHAPTER 2

ISLAM AND WOMEN

At the time of the Quran's revelation, sixth-century Arabia was experiencing an enormous socio-anthropological flux in the region in general, and more specifically, in the Hejaz.

While Arabian society had a number of distinct matriarchal features, these were now being replaced by a wholly patriarchal system. Muslims in general hold that this was a period when women were regarded as not only socially inferior but as 'slaves and cattle' (something to be bartered)... It was a time when women basically inherited nothing but were themselves inherited. They were part of their husband's property to be owned by his heirs or other men of his tribe. It was a mark of dishonor for any man to have a daughter and many preferred to bury their female children alive at birth rather than face social opprobrium (ostracization from the birth of a daughter.)³

Although not as blatant as in the pre-Islamic days, much of these attitudes filtered into the religion and became an impediment to women's liberation and therefore were disregarded by the practitioners of Islam. Due to the authority of the orthodox conservative religious authorities, who maintained a fixed and rigid interpretation of the Qur'an, especially in the sphere of the treatment of women's rights. This viewpoint is maintained in many areas presently.

³ Farid Esack, *The Quran: a Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 180-181.

Islam has remained and has reverted into a cave ⁴ since the death of the Prophet in terms of equal treatment to women. We question whether Islam is a detrimental force in the lives of women.

Ahmed states in *Women and Gender in Islam*, that “the subordination of women in the ancient Middle East appears to have been institutionalized with the rise of urban societies and with the rise of the archaic state in particular.”⁵ She repudiates the androcentric theories based on biology and “nature” that women are inferior to men. Citing a Neolithic settlement in Asia Minor dating from circa 6000 BCE, she explains how the “larger burial platforms found in the houses contained women, and the paintings and decorations on the walls of numerous shrines prominently featured women.”⁶ The mother-goddess was venerated in a number of Middle Eastern cultures in the Neolithic period, including Mesopotamia, Elam, Egypt and Crete, Greece and Phoenicia.⁷

The patriarchal family, designed to guarantee the paternity of property-heirs and vesting in men the control of female sexuality, became institutionalized, codified. Women’s sexuality was designated the property of men, first of the women’s father [*notice that in marriages in Western society the father “gives the bride away” to another man*], then of her husband and female sexual purity (virginity in particular) became negotiable, economically valuable property. This led (some have argued) to the emergence of prostitution and to the enforcement of a rigid demarcation between “respectable” women (wives), whose sexuality and reproductive capability belonged to one man, and women who were sexually available to any man.⁸

⁴ Plato, “Allegory of The Cave,” *Republic*, VII, section 514a to 517a, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D7%3Asection%3D514a> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 11.

⁶ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*

“Code Hammurabi (circa 1752 BCE) limited the time for which a man could pawn his wife or children to three years and expressly forbade beating or oppressing these debt-pawns.”⁹ Women could only obtain a divorce with great difficulty and if the reasons for the divorce were false she could be thrown in the water (to drown). If a man raped a virgin, due to the economic hardship he placed on her father (virgins then and now command a higher bride-price), the rapist would have to pay the father the price of a virgin and to marry the woman he had raped.¹⁰ This also motivated prospective partners to satisfy their inclinations to one another in creative ways in order that they can present for observation, a blood-stained sheet that was evidence of the virgin status; this deception is not only practiced by Muslims.

These codes set the tone in attitudes toward women and filtered through the Abrahamic religions that used various Semitic languages which Wesley Muhammad, in *God's Black Prophets*, argues it is not a racial designation. He concludes, that what is called the “Near East is part of Saharo-Nilotic ethno-cultural elements” and “that what is known as the Near East is more properly thought of as Africa’s ‘North East extension,’ because geologically and geographically, that is in fact what it is.”¹¹

According to Danna Reynolds:

The indigenous or “Black” tribes of Arabia were those who in ancient times migrated from Africa... and were the earliest purveyors and dispersers of the Semitic dialects. The Semitic family of languages, the

⁹ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Wesley Muhammad, *God's Black Prophets: Deconstructing the Myth of the White Muhammad of Arabia and Jesus of Jerusalem* (Atlanta: A-Team Publishing, 2010), 38-39, notes 101,102.

most widespread is Arabic, is a branch of a larger language phylum called Afro-Asiatic.¹²

Culture is easily spread by language. Although there were variations between Semitic languages much of the culture remained intact and in some cases was rigidly enforced by religious codes that are still extent today.

So we state, emphatically, that Islam, like its sister religions Judaism and Christianity, is not patriarchal at its base; however, men dominating the interpretations of the texts and enforcing their interpretation on the text, usually through violence, have reduced many aspects of the religion to a misogynistic cult, that politically disenfranchises women and children, and a requisite body grooming that can also debilitate a women.¹³ These are some of the aspects that deny woman equal treatment in sacred spaces; what is even more appalling is the fact many men in leadership positions and the laity believe that this is the way to practice Islam in conformity with a crime that remains entrenched as part of the gender recidivism that took place after the death of the Prophet (PBUH) and his *Sahaabas* (companions). Today other religions are trying to balance the scale to some extent.

Christianity and Judaism have attempted to correct this by recognizing women as ministers and rabbis but once accepted there is another struggle for women due to the dominant power structure in most religious institutions remains in the hands of men. If men are unable to then recognize women as equal partners what does that say to the transformative quality of religion. Islam has yet to reach that stage and a fierce struggle

¹² Ibid., 39, 40; Dana Reynolds, "The African Heritage and Ethnology of the Moors: Background to the Emergence of Early Berber and Arab Peoples, from prehistory to the Islamic Dynasties," in *Golden Age of the Moor*, ed. Ivan Van Sertima (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 1992).

¹³ Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 166.

continues as to women's place in religious services within Islam; that place has yet to be defined or implemented in nearly 1400 years. The loss of spiritual input from women robs Islam of spiritual insight that is a gift from God.

The Masjid needs to welcome and invite sisters and their children with more than mere words but environmental structures that demonstrate awareness for their concerns and needs. Maintaining women as "other" presents an atmosphere where full human rights are denied, inhumane behaviors are condoned and identified as domestic disputes as opposed to physical abuse; but, it is more than that there is a rearrangement of the abused person's spiritual superstructure. When one's belief in an all-powerful entity and that entity is spiritually impotent and unable to, protect, redirect, suppress or eliminate the traumatic pain experienced it becomes more than just hope that sustains belief in this entity. That hope becomes translated into "Is there something/anything to hold on to?" It also sets a platform for investigating these phenomena that has lasted for too long.¹⁴ Why has God deserted me or what did I do to deserve this?

The death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) signaled the end of the drive for the uplift of women in Arabia. Shortly after his death, the negative aspect of inequality began to settle in, once again, in the society. Some of the major advances by the Prophet (PBUH) were his concerns for equality as witnessed by:

1. He made reading mandatory for women, to the consternation of many of the men, in Arabia. Women, like slaves, usually did not receive education and therefore could not read, he made it mandatory for all Muslim to read the Qur'an. A practice that is not adhered to today.

¹⁴ Islamic Social Services Association and Women in Islam, "Women Friendly Mosques and Community Centers: Working Together to Reclaim Our Heritage," <http://www.islamawareness.net/Mosque/WomenAndMosquesBooklet.pdf> (accessed January 18, 2014).

2. For the first time in history, women were allowed to receive their inheritance, children also. Inheritances were usually eaten up by male relatives and were a form of acquiring wealth for men from women and children.
3. Women had the right to divorce and to keep what they earned. This was not possible under the former system. In addition, women were given the right to voice their opinions.

These are just a few of the social modification that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) implemented and because of this he faced great opposition from the aristocracy down to the common man. The opposition was so great that some decided to get rid of him and revert to the “ways of our father” the battle cry of patriarchy.

The word *Fuqua* generally means scholar and is from the same root *sufaha* – one with diminished mental capacity. Reza Aslan on the heels of Fatima Mernissi, reports how the definition of the word *sufaha* was changed after the death of the Prophet to define women and children. This change in definition allowed the men, once again, to devour the property of women and orphan children

Secondly, *Hadiths* began to appear whose *Isnad* (chain of narrations) were highly suspect and rejected by many scholars. Many of these Hadiths began to announce a reverting to the ways and customs of old where men of privilege would once again reclaim the privileges they lost during the lifetime of the Prophet (PBUH).

Thirdly, when institutions of learning were established women were forbidden to enter these institutions despite the fact that women were the producers of reliable Hadiths and were scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and history during the time of the Prophet.

Many of the sparks from the flame of patriarchy still exist within Islam today and provide the primary motivation for the differential treatment meted out to women and children. As the world community got smaller and African Americans began to intermix with Muslims from all over the world they learned that gender inequality was consistent

with religion, and women were the gateway to hell due to physiological functions. Men were superior to women due to anatomical structures, misinterpretation of the Qur'an and misogynistic commentaries that failed to hold up the Quranic ideal of equality. Islam has a host of issues internally and externally; there is a need to resolve the internal issues and unify the community under the banner of equality, not to just tolerate differences but to accept them in a pluralistic society. La kum Dinal uKm we Liya Din, "to you be your and to me be mine" (Qur'an surah Al Kafiroon).

History of Domestic Violence

The history of Domestic Violence intervention in the Muslim community is recent due to the denial of the issue being considered a serious problem or one worthy of intervention and attention. Most of the scriptural interpretations of the *Qur'an*, then and now, are completed and published by conservative men who resisted seeing it as a problem worthy of attention due to a cultural interpretation that was pre-existing prior to the introduction of the *Qur'an* to that community. The Muslim community is playing catch-up in a way, driven by the youth, many who rejected conservative interpretation out of concern for their mothers, sisters and daughters; they joined the ranks of other Muslim men and women who uncovered the flaws of the inflexible approach to Qur'anic interpretations.

This non-ideological approach to interpreting the Qur'an in context and reviving its primary reason for existence serves as a guide for everyday living and a mercy for those who abide by it; and coupled with the potent writings of a plethora of Muslim women scholars has moved the conversation from the hidden to the open. This energy opened the door of permission and Muslim men began to examine many of their teachings and realized that it didn't make sense and slowly the tide began to turn. There

still remains a great deal of work in educating Muslim women and men. Frontline advocates are a small group compared to the work that needs to be done, but communities are at least open to hearing the message.

In our community there is great concern of the media misrepresentations; police departments' high-handed intrusiveness; how these prevailing ideations will affect our children; and how unemployment, hunger and homelessness affect members of the community. More importantly, how does it intersect with DV? Latest studies have concluded that they do intersect and there is a negative interaction when these social variables are in combination with DV.

Similar to the denial of minimal health care to women society is remiss in viewing the cause and effect issue when there are ample resources to meet the need of the people. What is a just follow-up for a person who dies from cancer due to the lack of a breast exam or Pap smear? Do we stumble along in our media induced stupor with indifference to a neighbor dying? Faith has been described as "faith seeking understanding." How does an active faith understand the inhumane behaviors being proposed by lawmakers? We want to convert, revert, and proselytize; where is the concern for that "human document" here on earth. What will shake the faith community? The faith community needs to wake-up from its bed of complicity and amplify a message of resistance to the abuse of their neighbors, family members and loved ones. As it stands now religion has been reduced to a pacifier for a multitude of sins.

Saudi Arabia is the country with the largest missionary outreach providing the same resources more or less that missionaries of all faiths provide: cookie cutter theology that rarely frees people from levels of abuse imposed upon them by ruling elites of the

country with the “pie in the sky” philosophy. As reported in the media many of the so-called suicide bombers were induced with payments of \$25,000 and 40 virgins when they get to heaven for sacrificing for the cause against the infidels (a misinterpretation of grandiose proportions). The question is why are people so desperate that they are willing to blow themselves up? The news media Al Jazeera showcased a TV program that conducted interviews with children suicide bombers who according to the commentators came from extremely poor families, never read the *Qur'an* or any other book, were admitted to madrasa for the express purpose of blowing themselves up, and were never taught Islam. (We maintain that many of the extremists' interpretation are clear proof that many have never read the Qur'an and if they did their understanding is twisted; Islam is about compassion for the people not causing fear amongst the people. Many American children experienced another kind of abuse of power that leads to death for the poor and uneducated in many ways it is what is being proposed in America by its' leaders.

In dealing with media one needs to check out their sources for accuracy, as the media thrives on sensationalism. Although different in tactics both Christianity and Islam are examples of religious extremism and join with other examples of religion going off the tracks in Africa, Russia/Chechnya and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Many popular news magazines (TIME, LIFE, MESSENGER, etc.) have featured specials on all of these stories and the UN has taken up the matter in the General Assembly also. These incidents are the result of people who profess that they are religious!

Recently there has been a sustained effort by Islamic scholars, both female and male, to explore the status of women in Islam. Unfortunately much of this debate becomes a dichotomy between the female perspective and the male perspective as

opposed to a unitary view that presents a just and humane view of the *Quran* that treats all humans as equal and interjects compassion and understanding of the issues that we as humans must endure and embrace all of God's creature regardless of their personal preferences. The concerns of women have been either ignored or presented from a male perspective often defined as patriarchy.

Patriarchy is a systematic devaluation of the worth and value of women (children). Patriarchy involves the political process of constructing gender supremacy from biological difference. Ideologically the transformation of male to man, and female to woman, occurs in such a way that man is prioritized while woman is rendered different (synonymous with unequal) less than, or other. Patriarchy is not primary or causal in the development of other forms of human oppression. Moreover, it is not an overarching framework that adequately encompasses other forms of oppression such as class or race. Women experience patriarchy vastly differently depending upon their race, class and other social markers of identity that are different from, and interact with, their gender identity.¹⁵

Some of the horrific murders that took place in Islam motivated me to study and learn about Islam and its position on women. In the beginning I focused on "Honor Killings" and how it was religiously justified throughout the world; how shocking to uncover that it was illegally practiced in the United States, Great Britain, Germany and other Western countries as reported by the media. This is a pre-Islamic cultural behavior that has more to do with acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female members, who are held to have brought dishonor to or upon the family. In a survey by the BBC's Asian Network, 1 in 10 of the 500 Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims surveyed said they would condone any murder of someone who threatened their family's honor.

¹⁵ Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 5.

As gruesome as this sounds, Black women were lynched, shot and killed for being related to someone that a lynch mob either sought or imprisoned;¹⁶ a mother raped and lynched for her son's misdeeds.¹⁷ This is where race and sex intersects—the tragedy for Black women was that they themselves were brutalized for the color of their skin and their sex; in addition, the majority of lynchings were inflicted on Black men who were the husbands, brothers and sons of these Black women. How long does it take to erase collective traumatic memories? Where were the reparations for these crimes against humanity? These white men and women went to church on Sunday and many pretended to be religious after mistreating their co-religionist in the same faith.

Notwithstanding this behavior of torching and lynching was carried out on white Christian women as well. The state, under the guise of witch hunting, persecuted and tortured women who were folk healers and midwives. The state identified groups as enemies: heretics, Jews, lepers, homosexuals, and created the myths that would enable rulers to destroy those groups.¹⁸ More women than men were accused of witchcraft or heresy; therefore, more women were murdered. These women were tortured, often murdered while awaiting trial.¹⁹ These same tactics and rationale are being used by Christian fanatics to characterized Islam today—“The best Muslim is a dead Muslim.”

Barstow states that

Mass panics for which the Catholic Germans lands were famous were made by two beliefs. The first, that Satan intended to destroy Christian civilization and require hordes of witches to do so, led to the “conspiracy

¹⁶ Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1996), 110.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96; 175.

¹⁸ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco: Pandora, 1994), 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

theory” of witchcraft, in which sorcery was seen as treason (sedition against the state), as an attempt to overthrow state and church; fear was concomitantly intense. The second followed from this: that therefore witchcraft was so heinous a crime that the use of torture was justified.²⁰

In the 21st century we can replace witches with jihadists and justified torture with Abu Graib, Guantanamo Bay, and other “Black Ops” in Afghanistan. (It was reported by local news outfits that Sheik Muhammad, the so-called mastermind of 9/11 was water-boarded 183 times and still refused to talk or give useful information.)

So we arrive at the conclusion that torture is instrumental by the state (usually men) to any person(s) or group(s) that is perceived as a threat to the state’s authority (the Romans with their conflict with Jesus, the son of Mary). Women are forced to live up to an unrealistic ideal (obey their male relatives wishes’ and marry whomsoever they dictate) and if they do not remain in these prescribed barriers they encountered severe social reactions from society (men) that include economic deprivation, social restrictions, physical and verbal abuse and death at the hands of their intimate partners, relatives and sometimes their sons. The state being the chief of operations for most of this mayhem directed toward women.

Delores S. Williams, in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, states:

The Virgin Mary as a social construct has stood for purity and innocence, which were qualities assigned to white women. Black women were construed by white social mythology to be loose, immoral, and incapable of either innocence or purity. Thus the Virgin Mary can be a negative symbol for Black women: “too white” and “too false” to represent what is acceptably (Black) female.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 61.

²¹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 180.

There is no denying the compatibility of African-American women's reality with Chung's statement that "when Mary is placed as a norm for 'ideal womanhood' outside of Asian women's everyday, concrete, bodily experience, she becomes a source for disempowerment for Asian Women."²² In fairness this ideal that she speaks of is equally unattainable by white women; as they too are the victims of psychological and physical abuse for not obtaining this "ideal norm."

These norms are implicit in the "power and control" mechanisms that are the basis of misogynistic behaviors. Misogamy appears to not be the cause of these behaviors but a deep down rooted suspicion, mistrust and paranoia-like response to interaction with their intimate partners to maintain "power and control." This control was necessary to give the women to other men, without their consent, for social and material favors (today this behavior is called "pimping").

Gayle Rubin, in *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism*, is quoted as stating

The organization of people into social groups may have started when men began to exchange their sisters and daughters for the sisters and daughters of other men...And as a result of these gift transactions, certain people became "kin." However, since women were not partners to the exchange but, rather, the objects traded, they were denied the social rights and privileges created by these acts of giving.²³

These behaviors appear to be almost universal among patrilineal groups, the giving of daughters and other female relatives to other men. The language reveals some of it: Now we pronounced you "man and wife." (Men keep their status while woman is sentenced to be objectified as wife to death do they part, much different from "I

²² Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 76.

²³ Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 131.

pronounce you woman and man.”) The language used in the marriage ceremony reveals subtle power and control ideations where the woman is objectified (wife) and the man maintains his humanity.

Jamal Badawi, in *Gender Equity in Islam* discusses gender equity under four broad headings:²⁴

- The Spiritual Aspects
- The Economic Aspects
- The Social Aspects
- The Political and Legal Aspect

We take a strong exception to his social prescription that

Allows for a husband to administer a “gentle pat” to his wife that causes no (observable) physical harm to the body nor leaves any sort of mark. It may in some cases, bring to the wife’s attention the seriousness of her continued unreasonable behavior (refraction).²⁵

The proof for this kind of violence is not, I repeat, not in the Qur’an or the Hadith traditions. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) never resorted to beating as a way to resolve differences with members of his household. Muslims are obligated to follow the examples set forth by Rasullulah. Are we to believe that only women caused trouble in the marriage and men are correct all the time as Badawi would have us to believe? By prescribing corrective actions for one gender (women) for social infractions and not the other, he promotes a colossal blunder, in terms of gender equality, to astronomical proportions.

He does not prescribe a corrective prescription to be employed by women when the men behave incorrectly. This fact alone demonstrates the depth of the misogynistic ideations of this author and consequently we cannot even estimate how many Muslims

²⁴ Jamal A. Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam* (Falls Church, VA: World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 1995).

²⁵ Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam*, 25.

have been misled by his writings into thinking that the mistreatment of women is part of the religion of Islam and that there is not a need for equality.

He pushes the conservative viewpoint that the men are in charge (power and control initiatives); that women and men are not equal partners in their marriage. After beating the women he advocates for divorce as the “last resort.” No need for drama here: if you are going to cut someone off would it not be better to do it before you beat them up? Let’s be truthful. The divorce was pursued because the physical violence did not yield the desired result. These are the dreadful behaviors that have women on guard with potential and actual husbands.

Women are often treated with disrespect in the Masjid itself, sit in the back of the Masjids with curtains obstructing their view of the speaker and diminishing the non-verbal communications cues of the speaker, some places the private facilities are in poor shape, and in others women are not allowed in the main prayer hall.

In the shadows these issues are sometimes discussed, rarely in the open. Those men who do discuss them are considered eccentric and those women who do are defined as having the Islamic equivalent of “penis-envy” in not so polite terms. The youth today are questioning these double standards directed at their mothers and sisters, and find that the answers often do not make sense as they strive to find the “wisdom behind the commands” to marginalize women. As Islam is being attacked externally by some in the media for behaviors that have nothing to do with the religion of Islam; and also, internally for practices that are *bidaa’* (innovations) without any precedent, Islam can revive itself by being inclusive and remaining patient in the face of adversity.

CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Prophet (PBUH) stated that he feared no greater trial to his community than the fair treatment of women in his Farewell Khutba (last sermon, shortly before he died). Throughout his ministry he strongly advocated for women, orphans, those who were turned out and the poor. Keeping with the Prophet's (PBUH) last request, to treat women fairly, would place Islam on a worldwide course toward the full liberation and emancipation of God's human creation. Setting a true example of God's love in action for the entire world, first we have to invite women as full participants in our worship structures, involve them in the decision making process, allow them to speak and address the Muslims; in short, empower them.

In addition, allowing women to present from the *mimbar* (pulpit), would allow the Islamic community to hear the spiritual insight, inspiration and thoughts of women. Maintaining a bar of segregation against women sharing their spirituality has proven, in many instances, to be a major mistake that has plunged Muslims into harsh and brutal behaviors instead of nurturing one that would bring Muslim children closer to Mosque. It nullifies the *Basmala*: Most Gracious, Most Merciful (part of the beginning statement of Muslims prayers called the *Fatiha* [Opening] at least 17 times a day) as we turn toward our female co-religionists and restrict their utterances, rituals, and acts of worship on the illogicality of anatomical structures despite creation from the same Creator.

In spite of the desire of the Prophet, however, men continue to use the Qur'an and the words of the Prophet to justify violence against women. Shaykh M. Hisham Kabbani and Homayra Zaid state that the notion of "wife-beating" in Islam revolves around only a single verse (actually a single word) of the Holy *Qur'an* (4:34). Here are two typical translations of the verse.

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill conduct (first) admonish them; (next) refuse to share their beds; (*and last*) *beat them (lightly)*. But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance) for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).²⁶

Men are in charge of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women).²⁷ So good women are obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah will have guarded. As for those from whom you fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, *and scourge them*. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.²⁸

The translations do not agree with each other except for men's false superiority over women.

According to Zaid and Kabbani one word invokes intense controversy:

w'adribuhunna from the Arabic verb "*daraba*." They state:

²⁶ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corp, 1983).

²⁷ Note that parenthesis are used whenever the translator wants to imply a persuasion or ideation that is usually not part of the text for example the word strength can also be interpreted as different obligations than the other, this changes the entire meaning from a patriarchal statement to one that is just and fair. Example: women have babies and are responsible for suckling the infant. This is a "different obligation" that a man can never fill.

²⁸ Marmaduke William Pickhall and 'Arafāt Kāmil 'Ashshī, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana, 2005).

Some scholars argue that the word in this context does not mean “beat” or “hit”; it means just “leave (them).” But it is obvious, and Allah knows best, that the word stands for “punishment” for some translators.²⁹

They further go on to state

Such scholars qualify the verb “beat” by the adverb “lightly” as in the above translation by Yusuf Ali to mitigate the harshness of the punishment they perceive in this verse. However, even this translation is misleading because it reinforces a faulty assumption that the Quran stipulates any form of physical violence towards one’s spouse.³⁰

This one word has caused women much misery due to the fact that some men have believed that beatings one’s wife is religiously sanctioned. Other victims of this word are the Imams or their delegates that have to intervene in cases of DV when they are aware that the word has been misinterpreted and one session is not going to convince the batterer that his argument rests on a faulty premise. The Masjid needs to include safety in its general women’s meeting and also in its general men’s meeting. This training needs to be conducted by someone familiar with the dynamics of intervening in DV cases and has been trained to intervene in an Islamic context.

We conclude by posing a question: What procedures should a wife employ if her husband was derelict in his marital duties? Apparently these scholars have no solution or refuse to offer one for the wayward husband who is allowed to give out punishment with impunity.

Stone and Duke in their introduction define theology as “faith seeking understanding.”³¹ This statement reminds me of the statements of one of my Shaykhs

²⁹ Muhammad Hisham Kabbani and Hodaya Ziad, *The Prohibition of Domestic Violence in Islam* (Washington, D.C.: World Organization for Resource Development and Education, 2011), 10.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Howard W. Stone and James Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 2.

(teachers) that taught me that a healthy skepticism is good for faith because it motivates one to seek answers. In my case I use the old Samurai concept of “Ronen” as translated, you gather what your teacher has taught you and you now learn from God’s creation. I’ve tried to come to grips with women’s faith. After being in a male dominated social order and trying to find refuge in a male dominated religion it is amazing to me, what faith. In religion men’s privileges far exceed those of those in the regular society that’s often referred to as a “rape-culture.” Is it the fluidity of the brain that enables it to shift information from the right to the left in huge volumes (the connector of the hemisphere to the left is much larger in women than men)? What accounts for this enduring faith in the face of historical, colossal pain and suffering?

Once faith was about implementing what men thought was what God (and man) wanted; now it has evolved to a contextual interpretation of what is best for all. How interesting and misogyny is for whom the bells toll. The burden of carrying it, patriarchy, for all these years has caused many men to die prematurely.

To that end it’s fascinating how in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an how much attention was paid to the womb and its God announced sanctity. Phyllis Trible’s *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* in the section entitled “Passages Along the Way” points out a number of instances where the womb is mentioned as a place of reverence due to the special connection by God to the womb.³²

In the Qur’an and Hadith special emphasis is placed on the womb. In Surah 4:1, Al Nissaa (the Women) God States...fear Allah (God) through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (*reverence*) the wombs (that bore you). In the Arabic and the Hebrew

³² Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), Ch. 3.

the word for womb is *rahm* and its root is the same for Mercy in both languages. Mercy is an attribute of God throughout all of the Abrahamic religions prayers, songs, etc. is devoted to this attribute. The above Quranic verse is usually associated with Equality.

In Surah 4:135 again in reference to justice Allah has stated:

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourself, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor: for Allah can protect you both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do.

Freedom of Choice

“Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from Error.

Whoever rejects Evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy Handhold, that never breaks” (Surah Al Baqarah 2:256).

Throughout the Qur'an there is a message of unity and equality and many of us need to be aware of some of the misogyny of the translators who, it appears, translate without context, which appears to be difficult to do in any language that usually winds up being a poor translation at best and a mistranslation at worst. Today people are searching for answers to huge problems of how we rescue ourselves from self-destruction; this is why the home is looked upon as the beginning of where we develop our moral and spiritual compass, where we develop in the womb of material life. Was that womb a secure and warm place or was it a place of immense chaos. Did we learn how to get along with others in our family, the neighbor next door? On the other hand was our life at that early age filled with shouts, fussing and arguing? Was there a safe place that we could go to and be secure in our thoughts? Was it always and perpetually upset, angry? And as we grew up did we examine the effect of a chaotic childhood and come to terms with it?

Many of us have things in our childhood we chose not to discuss due to the pain and it haunts us as adults. If you lived with ongoing shame from abuse where is the help to get you over that mountain of a burden? It has been said that God talks to you through your sisters and brothers but you have to hear them. For God has said

And when you are through with your present task turn you countenance totally to Allah to know your Lord is to know your SELF. Today's world is anxious to play the blame game and it's enough of it to go around but what we have missed is the part of accountability that we have a share in also. A smile can be a charity, so don't say I didn't have any money so therefore I couldn't give any charity. You have the power to uplift another person with a smile. So increase kindness, avoid arguments about religions it is an act of disbelief, extend your hand if you can to help another human being no matter what race, creed or color. For Allah, whose name is praised forever, has stated, "I am free of all wants and worthy of all praise (Surah Inshirah 93).

We are aware from the Qur'an that we would be tested to verify our belief, so easily do we project it on the devil but the devil beckons and whisper, we have the freedom to choose and sometimes our choices are made for reasons that are not clear to ourselves, that's why we are admonished to seek counsel. In the Qur'an Satan, with puffed arrogance, states that HE will attack humankind from all four directions: the front, back, left and right. God tells HIM that God knows what he knows not and leaves the conversation at that. What is implied here is that there are six directions and the other two were below and above? So walk humbly throughout the earth but keep your head to the sky.

CHAPTER 4

THE SUPPRESSION OF WOMEN AND THE ROOTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Many have pondered what happened to Muslim Women's scholarship after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). After the death of the Prophet, Islamic education became centralized and institutionalized, and one had to travel to attend the schools of higher learning. This device cost women dearly because women were restricted to their houses primarily and traveling was not an option for them, women were not encouraged to study Islam that was reserved for men only. Even today these dynamics still exist. Many of the teachers in Islamic schools are men despite the fact that there are many well-qualified women teachers available and historically from the time of the Prophet (PBUH) women were engaged in the religious discourse; indeed, the Prophet's wife 'Aiesha (r. allahu anha) is one of the most prolific transmitters of the life of the Prophet.. These dynamics initiated a male hegemonic, anticipatory expectation as young only; this includes Education, Religion, law, medicine and Marriage. Women rarely if ever perform these functions in representative numbers. This begins women's genuflecting at the altar of patriarchy and also culminates into the refusal of divorcing an abusive spouse, at the risk of life and limb due to religious misinterpreted convictions taught by men and reinforced by other women. These life and death issues remain real for many women today. There are a few intrepid Imams that have enacted administrative divorces to free a captive woman from a lifetime of abuse. One of the main contributors to this issue is parents

determining that their daughter will marry a relative, close family friend without the women's consent. These kinds of forced marriage usually lead to a lifetime of abusive misery for the woman and due to honor codes she is unable to divorce an abusive husband.

Under the ill-begotten honor code; the offended party (men) has the right to redress grievances to anyone (even physically) who helps his wife because his family's honor has been offended. So many men, because of the tradition, will not intervene on the women's behalf. This social notion (or male collusion) is difficult for many Americans to understand despite the American brand of power and control that is just as poor. In many parts of the world honor is more important than money and it is important to maintain it at any cost. We've heard of it when another man disrespects a person's wife, daughter or other female relative. How it was rearranged to oppress wives is another thesis. Needless to say there was no consent from the women that I'm aware of, and once again women's human rights were trampled upon and for most they donned the garments of perpetual servitude and the denial of human rights. These are not religiously sanctioned behaviors, they cultural and mistakenly been assigned to the religion of Islam out of ignorance.

In my work as a counselor, I've encountered women who, despite being treated abysmally, decided to stay in the marriage "praying for the best." One explanation that I received for their decisions to remain in the marriage was that "I want my kids to have a father." (There is a social stigma when women are divorced; they are viewed as "damage goods" because even the father of her children didn't want her). To many people this may not make sense because a poor husband to his wife is usually a poor father to the children and it appears as wishful thinking to avoid shame and embarrassment. Theologically it

may be the optimism or hope that God can manifest a miracle and save a traumatic-filled relationship without accounting for earlier trauma in the man and the woman's life. It also may be the notion that divorce is allowable but is one of the allowable things that God frowns upon according to a so-called tradition. (I don't know the reliability or train of transmitters for this tradition of the Prophet (PBUH); however divorce is acceptable in the Qur'an and it is allowable if the couples are unable to come to an equitable relationship of mutual love and happiness).

There is another reason that has to do with "power and control" ideations; if a woman divorces her husband this brings shame upon her family and other female relatives regardless of their age. This kind of shame places an impediment for the female relatives to marry back home, so the abused women is expected, by her family, to endure the mistreatment in order that her sisters and female cousins will not be discriminated against when their time for marriage arrives. I have met women who can recite Qur'an with so much beauty and perfect *Makharij* (pronunciation); they know the verses but in these instances cultural ideas overcome Qur'anic injunctions. Eyes filled with tears they humbly submit to a life of pain and hope that their sacrifice will free their daughters and Allah will reward them when they die. This kind of *Zulm* (oppression) is especially true in Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Again it must be stated for the record that none of these things are dictated by Islam, it is a cultural artifact that meets where religion and culture intersects. Some say to disparage Islam that this kind of behavior is part and parcel of the religion; they speak without knowledge and use "religion" as an excuse to not get involved by declaring it off

limits. It's not part of the religion; it's a manifest evil that should be exposed for what it is.

It appears, historically, that at one time it was very important to control women because women were bartered like sheep and indoctrinated to comply with wishes of their elder male caretaker; this is still in full effect today except today there may be a discussion that implies social acceptability. One would trade his female relatives to another tribe who in turn would trade his female relatives, and the two tribes would bond and enter a truce to the mutual benefit of everyone but the women.

It may seem out of sorts that these tribes would bond over exchanges of women. Women whose status was on the same level as an indentured slave, were denied almost all human rights, e.g. right of inheritance, right to education, right to choose who and when they would marry, compensation for work, and the list goes on. But why the trading of women and to what end would this trading of women be an advantage to the trader and the client?

Men have some strange and odd practices centered on the suppression of woman. Some required that women wear all kinds of contraptions to insure that the women were faithful while the men were engaged in war and were not engage with anyone, sexually, in the absence of her Lord and Master (husband). Other men amputated the unique sexual organ that only women possess specifically for pleasure (female genital mutilation), and that is not connected to the expelling of waste: the clitoris. The men hoped that this bodily mutilation would impede her feelings of pleasure and she would remain faithful, faithfulness being defined as not having another lover, in their absence. Well

unfortunately for some men and fortunately for some women, many of these social devices and others with the same thought in mind were unsuccessful.

Today we observe the same kind of Neanderthal-like logic projected by elected legislature officials who propose, without consensus, to invade the sacred bodily spaces of women with electronic probes for a procedure (abortion) that was ratified and made law by the Supreme Court (men) many years ago. What was more outrageous, they (men) approved Viagra class drugs and attempted to prohibit birth control and other medical procedures essential to the good health for woman according to the American Medical Association such as Pap smears, breast exams, etc. This assault on women's health needs and other restrictive measures on women have been dubbed "The War on Women." Men who are partnered to women should have been entirely turned off. The history of men has been for one reason or another to protect the sacred parts of women, sacred because God gives them that status in the Torah (1st Testament or Hebrew Bible) and the Qur'an. However these violations represent a severe abrogation of human rights while some of these legislators of this persuasion talk about preventing pregnancy by placing an aspirin between women knees. It is of utmost importance for all Americans to take a good look where we are headed in regards to the fair treatment of women.

The art of compromise is a lost art these days; instead we have adopted a "my way or the highway" attitude in terms of any kind of negotiations. As minorities, Blacks and Hispanics, continue to have higher birth rates than whites, as reported by the 2010 census, some white Americans fear the prospect of a takeover by the minorities whom they have treated shabbily all these years. The false fear is that minorities will vote their conscience; the real fear is that the majority, presently, will lose power and control.

No longer will they pretend that they love the military while proposing reckless and useless wars; when and if these veterans return home they are denied the promises that they signed at induction. I am a veteran and I didn't walk around with a flag in my lapel for a number of reasons. I had a supervisor on my job that admitted that he was a draft dodger to Canada; his upper middle class parents financed his act of treason. On a daily basis, he reminded me of how he became a supervisor without any tests while I had to take tests for advancement. We got to the point of critical mass and I had an in-depth persuasive discussion with him and he learned not to taunt me with his misguided sense of entitlement. Anyway I have lost close friends in Nam and I resent when someone who thought it was below him to serve but advocates for war as the first solution to every problem, and selfishly enjoys all that America has to offer to disrespect the guys, for whatever reason, that gave all they had to give.

The way I see it, war is another thorn in the crown of women. They lose their mates, sons, daughters and that loss is never restored. During Viet Nam a wife or mother (family) would receive 30,000 dollars that was also taxed by the federal, state, and municipal governments. Many Black women, and other poor people, were unable to send their sons to Canada and they went to the war zones. I imagine if they could they would have sent them to Canada, as there were a number of social traps in America waiting for young Black, Hispanic men then and now. I guess that many Black mothers felt powerless to protect their sons. They gave birth to babies that would be used as fodder despite that maternal bond that ties mother to child.

This is one reason why, even today, so many Black women report that they are distrustful of the feminist movement. When white women attempted to obtain the right to

vote, they partnered with the Black man, leaving the Black women to fend for themselves primarily, all of this is common knowledge. Lo and behold the Black men were given the right to vote to the chagrin of many of the white woman in the south. The Black woman suffering from the scars of sexual abuse during slavery; her cries for relief from the rapist were unanswered by the white women and now this amounted to another slap in the face as it was.

I spoke with Dr. Cynthia Diaz, formerly of NYTS, basically to find out what differences are there between the Womanist and the Feminist (previously I had thought that there couldn't be that much of a difference). I learned of these points of distinction:

- Womanist sought out a connection with Mother Africa and for all women of color who are usually enslaved economically and politically don't come from a privilege class with a list of entitlements.
- Womanist are concerned about their children and the affect from oppression in a system that is designed to impede their spiritual, intellectual, social and moral growth. This is not true for whites in this country
- They are particularly concerned about their sons repeating the patterns of misogyny and not changing, to move forward on gender fairness.
- They also were of the opinion that they needed their own movement to give voice to some of their fears and pain that is beyond the scope of whites to comprehend. She stated that they didn't mind working on common goals; in addition, I got the impression that alternate lifestyles were overblown when there are people starving and living in the streets due to domestic violence.

One thing that they both agree on is that misogyny has to stop and that there must be accountability in terms of men's violence committed on women. The clergy, the justices, teachers, social workers, police has to increase their awareness of the dynamics of DV and know how to identify and intervene. We should expect the first responder to

perform as expertly to a situation of a person choking as to a reported case of DV and assess if the person needs temporary shelter (pets too) are the children safe? That racism remains a huge issue even with feminist movement was projected to me in no uncertain terms. I was invited to do a presentation on DV with women and children. I asked a White friend of mine to team up with me, she agreed. She chose the people to attend and she chose everyone except a Black woman. As a Black man I found this unbelievable. My friend stated that she was unaware that she did it. I have no reason to doubt her; however, if racism is unconscious could patriarchy appear unconsciously?

Currently in NYC, DV organizations are vastly underfunded, as many of the organizations are appealing to everyday New Yorkers for donations in order to make ends meet. I know of an organization that almost went bankrupt due to the City Council's routinely late payments. The City Council's public face is concerned for the victims of DV, but out of the public spotlight it's a whole other ball game. I supported the "10,000 Man Pledge Against DV" at City Hall with the City Council. I gave a speech in reference of just showing up for photo-ops and not doing anything substantial for the thousands of people who are victims of DV is not a successful strategy; when will we extend the hand of kindness to the women and children that had to flee for fear of their lives as some drug-crazed abuser chases them with deadly intentions. Well everyone recited the pledge to stop all kinds of abuse to women and children. This is an annual event conducted by ConnectNYC who I have partnered and worked with for about 10 years. The Black Congressional Caucus plans to pick it up this year throughout the United States.

ConnectNYC works in the various communities of faith and partners with community members within the community. I'm proud to announce that I have been

offered a position as a consultant to Connect. (See Appendix B.) In order to keep reaching out and educating the community we've scheduled a radio show that will have discussions with community advocates for social justice. We are scheduled to be online in April/May. In addition, I have been contacted by a few national organizations to present my observations and reflections; the Muslim community remains an underserved community, and has entered this aspect of social justice late.

We presented at least 14 venues between hospital stays; these stays worked out positively for me because I had time to think, rethink, and reflect on my project. I talked with many nurses who were assigned to me due to the fact that I was in isolation from the public, they said was common procedure when your immune system is suppressed due to an infection and I was susceptible to the other people germs. I lost 30 lbs. and my overwhelming desire was to finish the work I started at NYTS and frankly I frequently had thoughts as to whether I would have the opportunity to complete the project. As promised when I first attended NYTS, I became obsessed with my project; I changed it and completely rewrote it five times. I was constantly tweaking it and changing the sentence syntax frequently because it didn't "sound right or feel right." In the Masjids many of the Boards had issues with my request to collect data because of the overbearing surveillance of the NYC Police Department that somehow came up with a cock-eyed mandate that observation of the Masjids would uncover destructive terrorist's plots. That's not the impression that I got from attending many of the Masjids in NYC.

If strangers came to a Masjid without an escort the security people would put an eye on them and anyone they interacted with. At times people were barred from coming

back to the Masjid for eccentric behavior, or approaching the women or children inappropriately.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

My initial thought was to do three presentations in a Masjid and measure attitudes through feedback. But after the showing of the film (DVD) an enthusiastic discussion would take place that I noticed would simmer down based upon who was in the room and what people would talk, as if they would catch themselves and change the subject or stop talking about the issue, often about abusive relationships. These Masjids are closed and close-knit communities and I thought I needed to move my presentations to community centers, meeting halls and other venues within the community to provide a “safe-place”. We wanted an environment where people would feel safe to discuss any issue they cared to without any public scrutiny.

We obtained use of some venues through in-kind donations and others we rented; we also struck a deal with a halal restaurant to provide food, exclusively, for the House of Peace (HOP) and was able to negotiate a price and feed the people that attended with a three course meal with dessert; coffee, tea, and cold drinks were donated by the HOP. I got food handlers to voluntarily serve the food. The move would prove decisive as it provided 1) a more objective environment; 2) was a safe space to get testimony from Muslims who may not feel comfortable in Masjids as opposed to a secular setting; and 3) it gave me the opportunity to get some input from other than Sunni Muslims. Although Sunni is the dominant group, in an informal setting I surmised that other Muslims and people would come out and attend. They did not make up a significant population within

the group and as far as I could tell their thoughts or views were in line with other Muslims regarding DV. The project was to increase the awareness of DV in the Muslim community that for the most part due to misconceptions about male privileges and the misinterpretation of certain Qur'anic verses; both are misconceptions about Islam that indicated that some were not grounded in their faith and others just went along probably to reduce stress levels. The “awareness campaign” was accomplished by direct consciousness-raising events, interactive lectures, DVDs, and group discussions with refreshments. (I would try to provide baby-sitting services on a regular basis. The few times that I was able to do this I had better participation in terms of turnout but some of these venues were in one room and some of the reports were too graphic for children).

I would bring my own projector, screen, and microphones. I packed and unpacked twice, once at home and once at the location – that’s four times for each presentation. Once in the hall, I would set-up the seats, sometimes I had help, but most of the time I didn’t. I tried to have locations that were near public transportation, and the time was from 6-8 PM; so we’d usually get out by 9PM.

I’ve also used a historic community location known as The African Poetry Theater to present a listening presence to the issues that plague our community: DV, substance abuse, unemployment, hunger and homelessness. This was accomplished with the Chaplains’ organization that I, with two others, founded. The organization was started with one of the goals being to obtain the credentials to be the Muslim endorsing agency to provide Chaplain Care for those in pain or suffering. We’ve decided to uplift and apply palliative care and issues of eschatology also.

I have already trained Chaplains for Harlem Hospital, both Muslims and Christians. They were trained on how to conduct the initial interview, assessing safety factors, and referring for health issues for the victim and her children, from there they could reach out to many of the fine organizations doing tremendous work in providing safety and shelter for those that have been turned out of their homes. The resources are here and they need to be redirected to life-sustaining goals as opposed to life ending goals: billions of dollars spent for new weapon system and each branch of the military has its own pet projects to create mass mayhem to masses of people.

In spite of the financial outlay on weapons of violence, the Muslim community remains underserved in this area of providing agencies of Domestic Violence and it was difficult to obtain resources for presentations that would educate our women and men to the correct approaches that are not guided by misinterpretation. We hope to get a sponsor and lease a building where we could serve the need of the Muslims community who are experiencing family violence.

During the presentations verses from the Qur'an that were supportive of women were discussed and verses that were mistranslated into English were exposed from the 'Arabic of the Qur'an and the Arabic/English Dictionary; women were invited to speak to a mixed audience; and families were allowed to sit together, this broke with some of the rigid protocol that some considered as etched in stone. I was pleasantly surprised by how many young men participated and added cogent remarks to the ongoing discussion. I included other speakers: herbs specialist, marriage matchmakers, Spoken Wordsmiths and etc.

First Didactic Training

The first project was presented at Harlem Hospital's Chaplains Pastoral Care Dept. led by Rev. Bailey and Imam Luqman. It was scheduled to take place at the Chapel on the third floor, from 6-8PM, for three consecutive Thursday evenings; this group consisted of Muslim and Christian chaplains. (See Appendix E.)

I had given didactics to the chaplains that attended St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway to a multi-faith audience that appeared to have gone well and as a result was invited to present at other Christian and Muslim institutions, which I accepted. Due to severe health issues I knew that I would not be able to give the full three years as was my intention. I needed to start producing/or continuing a body of work once I got an idea that would be featured in my project. During these presentations I used DVD presentations, discussions on the material, and a lecture on a Chaplain DV topic; we always concluded with a Q & A session.

Observations:

The most engaged group was Christian women; they stated that they didn't have a Ministry that focused on DV issues even though it existed in their church, some even stated that the pastor's wife was a victim of DV. Some of the women ministers were ordained but not given the "respect" by male colleagues and allowed to perform the rituals that their title empowered them to perform. Through the educational DVDs and the handouts they were able to better understand gender bias and patriarchy and conclude that they couldn't afford to wait for someone's approval before providing support for other members.

The Muslim women were quiet for the most part during this discussion due to the fact women are generally not allowed to perform religious rights or engage in religious

discussion in the Masjid (notable exceptions are the all women masjids in China and the women in Morocco that perform services to both genders except the *salah* [prayers]). I made a point by asking women to either open or close our sessions with prayer (women, generally, are not allowed to pray to a mix gendered group). For this act of “defiance” I am barred from delivering khutbahs (sermons) in Masjids. I believe that one didn’t have much to do with the other; I had received warnings about this course of social justice that I pursued but I continued relentlessly.

I had five Imams in the group and three Christian men, and despite prompting from the sisters no male chose to speak on this problem. Finally one Christian Brother got up and stated that things needed to change and there was a need for inclusiveness in “the body of Christ” and more words to that effect and that he would advocate for women in his church in Brooklyn. A Muslim finally got up with blatant hostility and accused me of *Bida* (innovations) and preaching a Christian concept. To make a long story short, it was apparent that his knowledge base of information was limited. He assumed that *Bida* was a negative but according to the *fiqh* (law) there are negative and positive *Bida(s)*. When I asked him why was he studying Pastoral Care when there were no Islamic precedents for the undertaking of this discipline until our Christian sisters and brothers invited us to learn and apply it to provide healing – a positive *Bida*. In addition, I informed him of the *Negus* (the Christian King) of Abyssinia, when the Muslims were being persecuted and murdered in broad daylight in Makka (Mecca), the King provided sanctuary for the Muslims. Without this sanctuary many historians are of the opinion that Islam might not have survived the persecution directed to them by the privileged elites of Makka. I conclude with the statement that Islam is indebted to Christianity and in the Qur’an Allah

states “that the closest to you (O Muslims) in faith are Christians.” He, the young man, packed his stuff and left. I’ve faced a few moments of hostility while on my journey; God is the Best Protector, Amin.

After he left the entire group thanked me for sharing that information. Some Muslims stated that they didn’t know that (even though it is in their sacred texts, the Qur’an and Hadiths). Only during the *khutba* (sermon) when one is not allowed to address the *khatibs* (religious speaker) am I free of these distractions and/or interruptions; I surmise because the situation is controversial and similar to when the Prophet (Peace and Blessing be upon him, PBUH) modified male entitlement and privileges to the extent that they considered committing physical harm to him. Similar to racism when people are confronted with a loss of privileges they have to make a choice: they move forward (progress) or backward (regress).

Moving this agenda forward the DVD that we watched featured the personal account of a Mississippi Pastor (*Speaking of Faith*) who shared his first encounter with Domestic Violence. His father, who was a pastor, had taken a wooden leg off a coffee table and beat his mother bloody. He recalls all the blood that was all over the living room and that his father threatened him to go back to bed or he would receive a beaten also. His mother, despite his reluctance to leave her, persuaded him to return to his bed and he was unable to return to sleep. His father was the pastor of their church.

Our discussion focused on how

1. **Religion** may be used to reinforce hatred and violence in religious institutions.
2. How **male privileges** set-up an un-level sharing playing field of power where women and children are usually the victims. How hard is it for women to relate to the term “father” if her father was her abuser?

3. Men have to be **accountable** for their behavior, no longer can they use excuses like “she made me hit her” or “I only slapped her one time lightly” or “my wife is exaggerating I only put my hands up to stop her from attacking me, I didn’t choke her.”

Second Didactic Training

The Chaplains were there early and we began our session on time. We briefly covered some of the key points from our previous sessions and started off with the DVD *The Man Box* that displayed, through documentaries, rap videos, movies and other visual media sources patriarchal interactions between women, children and men. It also displayed how women were marginalized at men’s athletic events (men depicted as gladiators, champions while women, dress in little girl-like cheerleader outfits, were placed on the sidelines to jump and cheer and displayed what is under their skirts as they behaved in a demeaning way promoting the objectification of women).

It also discussed homophobic responses that men engage in order to “protect” their manhood: avoidance of wearing certain colors; inability to touch or hug another man for fear of being considered “gay;” transferring all emotional needs to their women without providing the same support for their family; men must have the “last word.” The makers of this DVD skillfully moved from depictions of physical abuse to other kinds of abuse such as spiritual abuse, psychological, barring the victim from being in contact with family and friends. We spoke about techniques used as intervention strategies by leaders in the field such as Peaceful Families (Muslim), Institute of Domestic Violence in the African American Community (Interfaith), ConnectNYC (Interfaith), The House of Peace (Muslim, Multifaith; See Appendix F).

We had a brief discussion of some of the examples that people encounter in their everyday life. One of the sisters related a story of when she was in the bank in discussion

with a teller, a white man broke the line of three Black women and started talking to the teller as if she wasn't there. She viewed the impolite behavior as both racist and sexist. She reminded the man that there was a line and that he would have to wait his turn. The teller reinforced her statement.

Third Didactic Training

In the 3rd session we discussed the handout National Data on Intimate Partner Violence (compiled 2011, <http://www.opdv.ny.gov/statistics/reports/index.htm#1>).

Statistics were related to the following topics are included:

- a. National Intimate Partner Violence Statistics
- b. Intimate Partner Homicide
- c. Teen Dating Violence
- d. Health Impact of IPV (Intimate Partner Violence).
- e. Economic Effects of IPV
- f. How IPV Affects Children
- g. IPV in the Courts

IPV in 2005 took place 1 in every 320 U.S. households ³³

The article spoke of the thousands of victims; some of the trainees were shocked by the frequency of sexual assaults on females under the age of 12 and the frequency of assaults committed against men/boys of all ages.

In 2007 despite the fact that there was a drop (43%) in women homicides by IPV there still were 1,640 women and 700 men killed by IPV. In a supplementary homicide report by the FBI 1,818 women were killed by men, 63% were killed by IPV (ex-girlfriends not included) 550 of them with firearms-most often handguns. Black women

³³ Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Intimate Partner Violence: Attributes of Victimization, 1993–2011," <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4801> (accessed March 30, 2014).

were murdered at a rate 2.5 times higher than white women: 2.62 per 100,000 versus 1.06 per 100,000.³⁴

Project 4

I was invited to present by IDVAAC, from a Muslim perspective, the effects of Domestic Violence and my experience in providing Batterers' Intervention for first time to male offenders as an alternative to incarceration. (17 Aug 2012). Immediately after the presentation I became seriously ill and was admitted in the VA Hospital immediately after returning to NY. I was released in time to attend NYTS pre-semester registration rituals and assess the impact of presenting in a multi-religious and multi- ethnic venue. Working in this kind of environment provided a sharing of information and positive support for the work that I was doing.

The event took place in Newport News, Virginia at the Hilton Hotel. It spanned two and half days. I was contacted by the Director of "Institute of Domestic Violence in the African American Community" (IDVAAC), along with some other Imams, after giving a speech on the damage of DV to the victims, their children, their pets and the community in general; in Harlem for State Senator Bill Perkins. Below are statistics from the "National Coalition Against Domestic Violence"³⁵ that indicates the severity of the problem and it is believed to be underreported.

- 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.
- An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.
- 85% of domestic violence victims are women.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, "Domestic Violence Facts," [http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet\(National\).pdf](http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet(National).pdf) (accessed March 30, 2014).

- Historically, someone they knew has most often victimized females.
- Females who are 20-24 years of age are at the greatest risk of nonfatal intimate partner violence.
- Most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police.
- For more statistics or information on domestic violence please visit www.Nacdv.org

Discussion took place after presentation of the above facts. Again many expressed that they were unaware of the frequency of incidents of abuse. The facts that many of the experts we quoted from usually preface this discussion with the caveat that they believe that any and all statistics represent an underreporting of these statistics. In counseling sessions women have admitted that they haven't reported cases of abuse out of fear of what has happened to many Black and Muslim men while under police custody. In other words, police brutality allows other forms of criminality to exist unchecked because the police are engaged frequently in the abuse of Black and Latino men under their custody. In the first 3 months of 2012 the New York City police killed 30 Black people,

- 20 of the 30 persons were unarmed, 2 may have had firearms, and 8 were alleged to have had non-lethal weapons.
- Only 7 of the 30 people killed were over 30 years old.
- 8 were emotionally disturbed.
- 12 were innocent of any illegal behavior or behavior that involved a threat to anyone (although the killers claimed they looked "suspicious").³⁶

The nationwide presentation of Black people being brutalized while in the custody of the police by WikiLeaks are staggering; the high frequency of these cases

³⁶ Kirsten West Savali, "Killers Behind the Badge: NewsOnes Investigative Series on Police Brutality in Black America," July 6, 2012, <http://newsone.com/2023676/police-brutality-against-blacks> (accessed March 30, 2014).

causes many women to hesitate before they press DV charges with the Police because they feel that no harm should come to their loved one, some call it *forgiveness*.³⁷

I spoke about men's accountability for the abusive behavior, the Power and Control Wheel³⁸ and some of the cultural devices used to keep women in a subordinate place. I demonstrated some of the aspects of inhumane treatment toward the "other" in comparison with that colossal sin of slavery. Both forms of oppression emanate from the inhumane treatment of God's creation; the oppression of women and children with culturally driven motivations that many men in treatment appear to be totally unaware of. This is the notion of male privileges that are socially embedded and never consciously thought of (like my friend's unconscious act of racism) and acts out with blatant and much too frequent homicidal justifications to maintain this perceived level of entitlement. (Think Trayvon Martin and a long list of others.)

When the baby cries in the middle of the night, who is expected to tend to baby's needs? Who usually attends PTA meetings? Who, after working an eight hours shift, picks up the children from school, goes shopping to prepare the dinner, cleans the house and washes the dishes? Then she helps with the homework, it's usually the wife, mother, etc. The man needs to rest from a hard day of having someone over him bossing him around as if "he was a woman," very stressful; to relieve stress he indulges in a refreshing beverage while he waits for Monday or Thursday Night Football. Men need to be accountable and share the load 50/50. He can't engage in any of the activities because

³⁷ Guardian, "Datablog: Deaths After Police Contact or In Police Custody," July 19, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/jul/19/deaths-police-custody-data> (accessed March 30, 2014).

³⁸ Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, "Power and Control Wheel," <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/pdf/PowerandControl.pdf> (accessed March 30, 2014).

they are: below him, it's women's work. He clearly doesn't know where he developed these concepts from except for observing his father or other men, movies and other media outlets practicing the same kind of behavior. More discouraging he doesn't see the need for change and how meeting his wife halfway would be a more equitable distribution of the family workload. The military is ground zero for this kind of training. These imbalances frequently come up in group counseling sessions and some of the men are completely oblivious to these issues and are unable to generate any empathy for the lack of participation into their families' dynamics.

Some of the children interviewed refer to their father as the one who is "always angry, he yells a lot, he complains all the time;" often these descriptions don't contain the statement "my father" or "he's bossy." It leaves one with the impression that the "he" is outside the family orbit and is not really viewed as one of the family. If the child engages in behavior that is not so good and they are asked "how come? And talk with me." He's frequently seen as an outsider that they live with but not a real or authentic member of the family, because he doesn't interact with the family "likes mommy does." This dynamic needs to change and men need to be accountable for the positive rearing of their children and developing, maintaining healthy relationships with their children. Men are capable of making changes especially where it concerns their children. Their participation in the family dynamics will provide a platform for a healthy relationship for their daughters as well as their sons. As women make their way into the social and academic spheres of society, men can provide their daughters and other female relatives with their insights from being out there where previously they would only have had these conversations with their sons.

Project 5

I was contacted by ConnectNYC, a leading Interfaith Domestic Violence Organization, to do a training of Afghan Imams at the request of the “The Afghan Women’s Organization” due to incidences of DV and teenage violent dating behavior. The Imams and other stakeholders reported in 1-on-1 discussion with them that this behavior was shocking to them; and how to provide an Islamic solution was unclear. The truth of the matter is that many communities within NYC and the U.S. were experiencing the same thing and the issue was more frequent with the youth of today because of an increase in communication with smart phones, computers, I-pads, etc. Today’s youth are more technically savvy and remain in constant contact and mimic what they see and hear in the media.

While many of the youth remain faithful to their religion, they challenge many of the cultural dictates from a religious viewpoint. How much is religiously sanctioned and how much is pre-Islamic and the result of culture? One of the example is the Burqa, an article of clothing that is pre-Islamic but is considered a *Fard* (mandatory) by some Islamic authorities in Afghanistan, most notably the Taliban (literally: a student); however, it is not a part of the Islamic prescribed code of dress for woman in Afghanistan or anywhere else. The media in its zeal to characterized the Taliban as the “evil force” provide a rationale for the continuation for the murderous war and the extravagant waste of money that has deprived Americans of jobs, food stamps, medical coverage, higher educational support and their lives.

More importantly, Afghan youth react to the stereotypical medical images with shame and embarrassment as they strive to be socially acceptable and interact with the

larger American society. This is a lot different from the older Afghans whose social interaction with the larger American society is minimal.

The Afghan society has yet to find a lingual definition for the concept of domestic violence toward women and children. Afghan Women have tried to raise the level of consciousness and bring awareness to men for reducing the violence and sexual assaults of women and children. In many parts of Afghanistan they live by codes of conduct that are a few centuries in the past in terms of sociological and educational development. Their treatment of women and young boys, who are frequently, treated like girls, is a reflection of the overwhelming poverty their parents suffer where they are forced to sell them to the highest bidder in order to pay the rent. This is not a common practice. Many great *hafizes* (reciter of the Qur'an) come from Afghanistan; also many of the people are not formerly schooled in Islam and practice a caricature of Islam that for the most part are ignorant of Islam's religious injunctions and what they do know is generally taught by force and threats.

The Imams were cordial and were motivated to learn how to work with victims of DV and their abusers. The first concern they needed to learn was to support and not to deny the victims' stories/reports. We spent a great deal of time on this issue and what role the Masjid needs to play in terms of support for the victim and her children. Sending the victims to shelters was an unattractive alternative because of cultural issues and the fear that this would be reported to families back home. Once this information is reported the female members of her family may have difficulty getting married and could cause other forms of social ostracism. This device is very effective because in these kinds of societies honor is more than money and people go to great length to maintain honor.

A family's honor is worth killing women family members if that ideation of "honor" is jeopardized; honor can be in jeopardy by looking at a male of a different social status, a different tribe, or engaged in behavior that is considered unbecoming. Strangely, if a woman is a prostitute she is still frowned upon; however, since she earns money she somehow, is not held in total contempt as if she had violated the honor code that seals a worse fate for women. This honor code applies to women all over the world; it's not only in Afghanistan.

The Imams that showed up (12) were cultured and well educated. They had attended leading madrassas (religious schools and universities) in their country and held jobs as science teachers, doctors, engineers, etc. During the breaks before and after the sessions I used those opportunities to engage them individually and in groups. They spoke freely about DV and some of their issues with the youth. They indeed spoke about the older males and their desire not to go to jail. They were aware of the animosity that many Americans had for Afghan people in general. They also felt that they were victims of the Taliban also and were somewhat puzzled by the American dislike for them and asked many questions in an attempt to wrap their minds around this.

The majority of the men were of the opinion that some of the issues that they were facing was the result of the cultural bias they were facing and that it caused a rift in their community. The President of the Afghan Women.Org wanted to focus on domestic violence exclusively. The men felt that the causes were multi-dimensional and I believe that is so. Since the Masjid was the center of community life with the Afghan immigrants there was a need to address the concerns of the women because the DV was causing many problems that were both a financial and economic drain on the community – having

to provide Afghan lawyers because the Afghans speak more than one language depending on what region and tribe they come from. The majority is Pashtun and some are Tajik. While there is some historical animosity between the groups and they are competitive, the Masjid attempted to serve both groups. They rarely intermarry and when they do there are all kinds of family repercussions, especially on the woman's side. It appears to be the same kind of social response we observe whenever there is a mixed marriage or religions here in America.

The youth wanted to be absorbed into the American society and at times over-emphasize their Americanism by not speaking the native language, rejecting cultural norms, emphasizing American slang. The men expressed more concern for the way that many of the girls are behaving and it appears that this "rebellion" begins shortly before going to high school and they are trying to keep up with the boys. Some girls wear their head-covering leaving their houses and change their attire on the way to school.

The project came about because the Interfaith Church.Org (IFC) is supporting the building of a Masjid in Afghanistan. The IFC had contracted Connect where I worked for a number of years and they contacted me to provide an Islamic response to DV. I had provided training for both organizations; this training consisted of *Khutbas* (sermons) and training sessions for the African American, Guyanese, South Eastern Asia and Africans Masjids. I've also worked with Palestinian Arab organizations. Working with people who have trauma in their lives requires a different approach and particularly to women who remain in abusive relationships because of misinterpretations of religious scriptures that are culturally reinforced and attached to social and community shame and

embarrassment. Again, women are held hostage by religious and cultural ideations that are designed to erect models of power and control.

Women frequently reinforce these cultural and religious norms, a point that some women minimize. After working in the African community I came to the awareness over time that FGM (female genital mutilation) was conducted by the women, more or less as a rite of passage. There is a whole history behind why women control this brutal procedure and speculation why they so tenaciously hold on to this power. One of the theories is that in some societies due to the lack of power that this is the only outlet that women can control without interference from the men. In fact, men are totally excluded from the ceremony. Some of repercussions for not engaging in the practice are:

- If girls do not have the procedure they are not considered marriage material.
- Children are taught to shun the “unclean girl” and not to lay with her.
- If the “unclean girl” enters your house it will bring you bad luck (similar to the Jewish codes on menstruating women: can’t serve food, one cannot sit on the same bed or seat as she sits on, confine to her quarters until her period of impurity is completed.
- Unable to pray to God while in the period of “impurity”.

The restriction on sexual intercourse during the menstruation appears to be based on reasons of health and hygiene; the rest appears to be based without reason but animus toward women and girls. Misogyny is in all societies and it appears to be part of our historical heritage that was initiated when women were objects to be bartered and traded by men to form alliances and allies with other men. Everyone who participated in the exchange profited from it except the women. They were the commodity and had no say so in the transaction; these are the antecedents to the “bride price” and other monetary

forms of female enslavement. These ancient forms and some modern forms of marriage are to a high degree a form of chattel slavery.

Some people argue that chattel slavery and the slavery of the “Old World” that we find in the scripture was less benign than chattel slavery. This theologically is nonsensical due to the fact that people are still depriving people of their God-given rights and abusing one person because of race and another due to their poverty. This is frequently played out with sex workers, trafficking and other forms of human exploitation.

Immigrants have an immense problem sometimes when they try to fit into American society. They may need to stand-up, rebel against their community norms that come from a different culture, and perhaps not a pluralistic culture. So there may be some excesses when initially becoming a part of the American society until the person can adjust and obtain and maintain a balance. These developmental processes may take place in a few months or a few years. We are curious about acclimation to the American society based on how much resistance they have to confront and overcome; or is there a relationship with the two? In addition, I’m also curious how this dynamic applies to American youths and their flight from their parents’ institutions. One of the issues that many religious institutions are confronting is flight of the youth from their religion. Do these hallowed halls in their arrogance no longer speak to a new audience and why don’t they? How do we convert religious language to a common language and remove the “Ivory Tower” language and bring it on home to the youth of the day. When I worked with the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) I noticed that they had many youth participating in the movement because this issue (immigration) was close to their hearts. What’s close to the hearts of the youth today, why would Latino youth find the church as

a place to rally to, and the Afghan youth finds the Masjid a place to avoid. This analysis may be applied to other ethnic groups as well. Can we talk to people without using Holy Languages and “bring it on home?”

Project 6

In October 2012 the President of NYTS Dr. Dale Irwin invited me to participate in the 2013 NYTS Peace Conference in May 2013 and I accepted. The first plenary was entitled “Peace and Safety for Women and Children” and as it was open, I volunteered.

I in turn contacted two of my colleagues, Sally MacNichols and Quincy Walcott, the co-directors of ConnectNYC, partners that I had been working with for years. The presentation evolved around a panel discussion by the women and then another by the men. Rev. Riddle joined us shortly after we began the presentation, the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* show how women in Africa initiated a movement to increase awareness on the subject of DV and consequently resolution of repairing some of the harm caused by DV by mounting campaigns against “Female Genital Mutilation” (a pre-Islamic custom) that took place with many African young girls regardless of their religious affiliation.

Some of the women provided personal accounts of DV in their lives or a family member. The men’s panel was asked how they came to do the work; this question is frequently asked at mixed gender presentation. Some men feel that they are being attacked in a non-direct way and recalls incidents of conflict in their personal life; they compared it to asking a woman why do you keep returning to a person that abuses you? I wish we had more men that would stand up and express their motivations for addressing issues of DV, we don’t have enough men standing up for justice presently.

The plenary had a nice turnout and good participation. We needed to have more time scheduled because many of the participants, women and men, reported their personal experiences with DV in this safe atmosphere that NYTS provided. Consequently, the session ran over the time limits and we had to omit questionnaires and the length of the Q & A session. We were on a tight schedule and we underestimated the level of enthusiasm of the audience.

Personally, I used to think I was above the fray because I didn't hit women as a practice to resolve differences; I use to hit *for* women under my mother's orders. I could hit to protect my sister and cousins from some of the knuckleheads from pushing up on them or making inappropriate remarks. They, my relatives, would handle their business frequently and I usually only had to intervene in extreme cases.

I didn't hit women per se and convinced myself that I was not an abuser. As I had mentioned, I was the worst kind of abuser, as there are other forms of abuse besides physical abuse. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated: "A Muslim is the one when they see evil they do something to stop it; and if they can't do something about it they speak out against it, and if they can't do that, then they hate it in their heart; and verily, hating it in your heart is the weakest form of faith."

By remaining on the outside and not doing anything I was actually giving my approval to this behavior and perhaps acting out guilt issues from my past where I refused to intervene in acts of abuse, thinking they were private matters. And for the most part I believed somehow that men in relationships with women had the right to "take charge" and at the same time I didn't want to be a prisoner of past thinking, that past short-sighted decisions and reaction would stop me from going forward. I took a course,

in two parts, that charted the physical response to the fight or flight syndrome with Dr. John Aponte at ConnectNYC that opened a new insight into physiological responses to charged words; why we as men invest so much energy in certain words that make us strike out. I had been moving in that direction; however, this was a leap of expanding consciousness that was monumental.

I began to listen to the enlightened sermons of those who were not extreme in their views. Muslims, Christians and Jews and they revealed a center of thought where all three religious off-springs of Ibrahim (Abraham, AS) met in the center before going their own separate ways. When they turned down the noise they hear that they have much more in common than they have differences. As many of my Multifaith partners were able to learn when we addressed the subject of Qur'an-burning. I informed that in a way it was comical because every Muslim community has a *Hafiz* (women and men who have memorized the entire Qur'an, generally men) and that the burning of the Qur'an, as reprehensible as that is, would not impede worshippers in the least as they would revert to the original way the Qur'an was spread, through verbal recitation. In fact every Ramadhan a section of the Qur'an is recited daily at a pace that the entire Qur'an is recited by the end of the Ramadhan.

The presentation was a success as attendees informed other members and our ranks and attendance grew at each session. Some of the presenters in other plenary joined us and shared their insights regarding DV, trafficking, substance of abuse and the pornography industry.

CHAPTER 6

THE JOURNEY

During my journey in reviewing and researching the Demonstration Project I had frequent hospitalizations mainly due to recurring peritoneal infections as a result of my exposure to Agent Orange, among other things. I was hospitalized at a rate of every 6 weeks with serious infections that required powerful antibiotics, some of which I couldn't tolerate or keep it or anything else down in my stomach when given the antibiotic, especially in the Augmentin class.

Each time I would stay in the hospital I would retool my Project and tinker with it or another thought would enter my head that had to be entered into the project. A few times I completely revised the total project because it didn't sound or feel right. Although this began to get tedious it kept my mind off these recurring infections and gave me long periods to reflect on which way was I headed in terms of this Project.

In addition, I thought about being there in Viet Nam. It was as if these visits unearthed poignant memories that I had buried for a time that I really could reflect on them without my wrath from leaving parts of me over there. The military rates me as 140% disabled; all my injuries add up to this 140%. I don't know perhaps they'll get the other 40% my next swing through here. What money compensation that I did receive was done in piecemeal fashion and was spent primarily on family and this education that I obtained from NYTS (my blood money).

I was informed, one sad day, that my kidneys were functioning at less than 14% and that I would need to go on dialysis. I disliked needles all my life and the idea of walking around with a shunt in my arm was overwhelming; for the first time in my life my body had failed me and my pre-conceived notions of having to win at all costs went up in the air like smoke from a burning tree. Then my doctor, who was dying from pancreatic cancer, informed that he would try to get 100% compensation even though it would mean trouble for him. He felt that what was done to us (Vets) in Viet Nam was a crime. When I came to visit him, we would talk for hours. He would review my records and cry and I'd cry for him. He wanted to know why I turned down the placement on the Presidential Security Team. I was still able to hit a target from 1500 yards without a scope, unusual for a city dweller but I knew that I had had it and it was time to move on; I don't regret my decision. I had been shooting rifles since I was eight thanks to the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) summer camps, my Group Leader was in the Marines and made us practice until we got it right. I won a bleeding heart (Jesus') for scoring the highest score in the camp.

I had had it with the service even though I was on a fast track to promotion. My commander in Nam kept me close to watch his back. We were on the perimeter a few miles from the base and the VC frequently attacked because the beginning of the flight line was there. These thoughts, fire-fights on the flight line, e.g., came back with a stunning impact; so in a way concentrating on my project relieved some of those anxieties and flashbacks.

I spoke with my doctor and he suggested that due to my discipline, eye and hand coordination that I may want to think about peritoneal dialysis (PD) where I would

conduct the treatment myself 3-4 times a day, with fewer dietary restrictions and no shunt in my vein. I went for it big time; this was in 2008.

Things went smoothly until 2010 and then I experienced my first infection; it knocked me for a loop. My entire system went in retrograde mode. I had fever, couldn't eat or drink, anti-constipation meds didn't work, even when I drank water I would engage in projectile vomiting. They used that as an excuse to give me another AIDS/HIV test, it came back negative, again. Due to the fact that African Americans and Latinos were high risk for AIDS/HIV, the VA wanted to test us frequently and every time they couldn't figure out what was wrong with us.

My new doctor, the Chief of Home Dialysis, would blame me for the infections and threaten to put me on Hemodialysis. I would respond she could recommend but I'm not going on anything until I get an outside second opinion. I had other insurance from the State of NY. We would fight frequently, she made a mistake after I requested a lab analysis and she sent me home. I went into a coma at home and family members brought me back to the VA hospital where two surgeons removed an abscess from under my arm the size of a golf ball after I squeezed about two tablespoons of foul smelling stuff out from under my arm. The first time I had this was in Viet Nam, I burned the tip of a knitting needle and puncture the abscess and squeezed the offal matter out of it. They let it heal from the inside out after packing the wound with antiseptic gauze. It healed quickly. I had two other operations where I had to have things cut-off and walk around with prosthetic devices until I refused them and decided I can make it on my own.

Another strange thing was the VA doctors never informed me about the other option that I had left: kidney transplant. It was a nurse from Compensation and Pension

who had taken her husband to Einstein in Philadelphia and she raved about it so much that I went to meet the team.

When I arrived I met the head of the team, Dr. Muhammad Zaki, he walked in and said “As salaamu ‘alaykum.” He informed that he used a revolutionary new technique that reduces chances of infection and leaves no scars. (I thought experimentation!) His greeting helped to relax me tremendously. Estimated turnover time was about 20 months according to the nurse, except that I had the profile of a Native American blood type, rare for an African American and they couldn’t use the more common blood types for most African Americans, so I waited for 5 years.

After five years I received a kidney from a Black woman who met my blood profile. I went to Einstein Hospital in Philadelphia on a Friday evening at 10 PM (I was doing a lecture at the time) and arrived approximately at 12:30 AM. I went to the operation room at 6AM with my surgeon who was babysitting his daughter that evening. He was from El Salvador and stated that he does 400 transplants surgeries a year: kidney, liver and pancreas transplant.

Albert Einstein is one of the foremost transplant centers on the East Coast. After the surgery, then there was care and living in Philly near the hospital for two months. I left for a day each week to teach a class of Afghanistan Imams about Intro to DV 101. The Imams were kind to me, allowing me to sit when usually I walked when I teach

What a transformation, the doctors agree the best thing to do is have a transplant as opposed to any kind of dialysis and I can bear witness to that because slowly my strength began to return. I began to sleep all-night and wake-up with some energy. In addition, I realized that I needed to stop doing the research because I had reached a

saturation point it was time to go with what I had and end the academic procrastination by engaging in endless research and put to paper what I had. I had wanted to cover any and every thing and that was ambitious due to the scope of this paper.

While wrestling with my “grand Masjid” ideations as oppose to just placing a brick (Dr. Irwin) I remained in the real world due to the issues and my obligations to the community. I remained in consultation to a few Masjids and Muslim organizations. I gave private consultations to family and individuals in crisis. I also served on a few boards. Not to wallow in self-pity but I noticed during my bouts of illness there were no footprints leading to my front door or anyone volunteering to take some of this load off me. People would wait and as soon as I returned home I’d be given all the work that had accumulated while I was in the VA hospital.

In January 2013 I debated with my doctor because she wanted me, for the third time, to stay in the hospital (new doctor at Brooklyn VA, the hospital on 1st Ave was closed due to “Sandy” that flooded the hospital in NYC). This time based on blood tests she threaten to call in the VA police and have me restrained; in addition, she pulled out her trump card – informing me that if the two infections continue to resist the antibiotics I was receiving I would receive an emergency operation for (dreaded) hemodialysis. It hit me hard and I could hear two of the nurses who cared for me crying. I considered death a better fate than this.

I had just lost a friend, who was a double-amputee from severe jungle rot in the Da Nang, America’s most forward base facing the North Viet Nam regulars. He had always wanted to be a Marine, couldn’t wait to graduate from Boy’s High School (my elder brother’s alma mater) so he could join and wear that Marine dress uniform. He

would never allow me to buy him anything from the Commissary while in the hospital. He was always upbeat and when I'd enter his space I would bark out orders military style and we'd laugh. I miss him and others that I lost along the way during this journey and because of it I decided that I would try to resolve issues that made the military a viable alternative for many of us. Many may think that I should be happy because it didn't happen to me but I know they couldn't possibly understand because in many ways my pain is overwhelming and all the drugs that the VA has and therapy they could provide couldn't lessen this pain. I hope that I can give back because in the end I'm still a member of a community; my faith has been tested in a second by second environment where death comes to you without you being aware that it's happening because of mortars or other kinds of explosives.

You live and function in that kind of surreal context, sometimes closer to death than others, all of us fresh out of high school; graduated and drop-outs unbelievably close that so many phony social distinction disappear when your ass is on the line and lead is flying and you're watching huge machines being blown up into little pieces.

When I hear cowardly politicians advocating for war when they and no one in their family have chosen to serve their country by joining the military, I am filled with unbelievable rage. I'm aware that everyone does not need to serve but when you are eager and project that you want to engage America's military might against some country somewhere. I think what a hypocrite! "America's military might" is real men and women.

America is advanced in many areas but in face-to-face respect for each other America lags far behind as compared to some of the other countries that I visited and

some of the immigrant communities that I have visited here in NYC. In the area of equality America lags light years behind; with a multi- billion dollar porn industry; sexual trafficking; sex junkets to impoverished nations; a high degree of sexual assaults in the armed forces; pedophilia and much, much more. It can be redirected by people who believe that people have a right not to be exploited.

The stays in the hospital sharpened my insight. I recall when I was in graduate school in Psychology, I read a book by R.D. Lang and how he induced schizophrenic episodes to gain knowledge of the disease, that he did, and made some outstanding contribution to treatment. I thought it was possible for me to think like a woman cognitively and see the so-called American “rape culture” as a victim as oppose to being a perpetrator. I was unable to do it because I must make past redemptions from masculinities to switch streams now, so I listen to the stories of women and asked them a million questions. The first area I tried to experience was how I can curb my aggressive/assertive self and listen and not dominate the conversation. I tried by speaking softer and kinder and allowing others to speak without needing to have the last word, people would ask me am I all right. Perhaps after a couple of days, I quit. It occurred to me that I want to share a women’s perspective while maintaining my male heterosexuality, which was built on a platform of assertiveness that came from that patriarchal gender shaping. I wondered if the boredom from lying in the hospital bed and being in isolation had taken me close to the edge. My constant rearranging of my project, amazingly it played like a movie in my mind, and I kept changing it over and over again. I was never satisfied, it’s a good thing that they have deadlines or I would still be composing and changing things.

So anxiety has entered; I thought I had it under control. Where I started from and where I'm now is nothing but amazing. For instance, it's amazing how much information I can verbalize about this topic without preparation, how I compartmentalize the information and how long I can discuss some of the subject. I acquired all of this without consciously trying and how Qur'anic themes kept rolling around in my head. Much of what I see and what I hear is incorporated into this vault of knowledge and it connects to other areas of progressive endeavors. It seemed that the *Khutbahs* (sermons) would evolve around how we interpret the sacred texts, and the need for studying a religion from the language that it was revealed in.

I recall a story about Jesus (AS, Peace be Upon Him). He was in the town of the *goyim* (people of the world, land or unclean ones). A woman boldly came up to Jesus and began talking to him by begging for food. (It was not the custom for women to travel to the well by themselves and in the heat of the day unless they were of "ill repute" (in this case the woman had had five husbands). The companions saw this and brought to his attention by asking 'Why are you talking to an unclean woman?' The woman begged for the food because her child was hungry, plus possessed by a demon and Jesus (AS) replied "it was not meant to give the food of the children (of Israel) to the dogs". The woman replied that "that even the dogs have to eat sometimes." Jesus (AS) told her so strong is your faith that your daughter is healed as we speak.

This incident stands out because in those times the people who were considered unclean couldn't address a Rabbi (teacher, Arabic. MY LORD) and it was out of the ordinary for a woman to approach a Rabbi at all due to the obsession of the Jews with women's menstruation. To the chagrin of his companions he engaged the women in

conversation. After the discussion he agreed with the woman's logic and fed her and relieved her daughter of the unclean spirit.

It displays Jesus' (AS) humility as he spoke to a person that was considered in general unclean and a woman no less. He agrees with her straightforward logic- A Hebrew taking the advice of an unclean woman, unbelievable! The story makes little sense in its full import unless you are aware of the cultural customs of the time.

CHAPTER 7

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

The Process

All members of the Site Team participated in providing insight into the process. They are Shaykh Abdullah Adhami, Dr. Nuurah Armatullah, Dr. Sally N. MacNichols, Imam Abdus Salaam Musa, CPE Supervisor and Dr. Ruqiyah Mabe. We have had many in-person and phone conversations. Our talks on this project started with my acceptance to NYTS and are on-going. The team gave me their assessment verbally and I present from those conversations their assessments. I lost two members of my initial site team, Dr. Nuurah Armatullah, who was the first active site team member as she shared concerns of women and their ideas of how many of the Masjids accommodated women, who was hit by a car and suffered injuries that led to an early retirement from the Schomburg Library in Black Culture and Shaykh Abdullah Adhami who provided his expertise in Semitic Languages, as I tested hermeneutical boundaries as regards to interpretation on women, severe back injury that restricted his mobility.

The Assessments

1. **Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition.**

Bashir is knowledgeable about the history of Islam, the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and has studied the African American history of Islam from Africa to America and has shared this knowledge in *khutba's* (sermons) and lectures. He is an executive officer of the American Indigenous Islamic- CPE, the

Assistant Secretary General of the Council of African Imams in America an immigrant organization, an advocate for women rights, providing Domestic Violence counseling and batterers' intervention to the Muslims and the community at large.

2. Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions.

Bashir has knowledge of other religions, especially Christianity and Judaism by studying Comparative Religions and participating in interfaith organizations He frequently interweaves the texts of other religions within his speeches where they have common points of concern. He also demonstrates the vast similarity of the Abrahamic faiths. Due to his interest in the ministry of Jesus (AS) he attends Christian sermons and attempts to breakdown the wall that separates Muslims from Christians. He feels that many African American Muslims harbor disdain for Christianity because that was the religion of their tormentors and was reinforced by many of the famous theologians for the past 200 years. He makes a point of what Christ taught and what people who stated they were Christians did was un-Christlike.

3. Ability to engage productively in dialogue.

He engages in multifaith dialogue and has taught in immigrant *Masjids* and invited them to the American way of life. He is invited to dialogue in interfaith assemblies and is known for his even and friendly demeanor that goes over well with members of other religions that may not know Muslims on a personal basis. He has given major speeches for national Domestic Violence Organizations, immigrant rights and workers' rights organization. He seeks more knowledge

everyday from other religions that he shares in his *khutba*'s and lectures. He calls this his "peace initiative."

4. Ability to interpret sacred texts.

His exegetical pronouncements were always devoted toward gender equality and fair treatment of the marginalized, but his focus has become sharper in the last year and a half. He uses a common sense approach in his speeches with humor. He will discuss some of his "aha" moments. He is able to bring *pathos* without abandoning *logos* and maintaining *ethos* throughout his talks. He has rejected the forever repeated "He" as he stated that God is free of gender and the gender that we use is a Lexical Gender. By referring to God as "He" excludes half of the human race as part of God if the notion of a Lexical Gender is not added to the vocabulary. Bashir believes this and encourages others to use non-gendered terms when referring to God as much as possible.

5. Ability as a worship leader.

Bashir has conducted the prayers using Arabic and English, he has based his *khutba* on Qur'anic passages, *Hadith* and *Tafsirs* (commentary on the sacred texts). He now adds antidotes in Greek and Hebrew languages that he was introduced to at the Seminary he attended. He spends time after the service in dialogue with members of the *Masjid*. He has provided prayers for interfaith gatherings. At times roaring like a lion and other times soft and reverent like prayer. Bringing a grasp of knowledge that bridges traditions, he provides a knowledgeable and informative speech. He is a gifted speaker, with a powerful

voice and commands attention. He is well received by the Muslims and others whenever he speaks.

6. Facilitating transformation

Bashir remains intrepid and bold in his *minhajj* (journey) for gender equality. This has diminished his reception in some circles within the Muslim community and requests for him to deliver the khutba have decreased significantly. He continues to “speak truth to power” and continues to bring others into the conversation. He believes that Islam must be viewed in context with a pluralistic society (peaceful co-existence with all neighbors) not by the dynamics of the agrarian Arabian society from 1400 hundred years ago; believing that the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* are still applicable in context to today’s society.

7. Ability as multifaith leader.

He is able to participate wherever God is held in esteem. He does not single out people of different faith or those who lack faith. He has given talks requesting the rights of women and immigrants be granted. Being able to meet on common ground with others has often put him in the role of peacemaker in his own community. To be able to listen to different issues, be just and impartial remains one of his gifts. (Allah has stated in the *Qur’an*, “Stand up firmly for Justice even if it’s against yourself, your family or kin.” (Surah 2, Qur’an)

8. Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator

Bashir has demonstrated his strong belief in the love of God for all His creatures by teaching against Gender Inequality (an antecedent to DV) in multifaith settings despite the entrenched ideations of gender inequality in his own religion; he

preaches and teaches in his community also in multifaith congregations. He has provided Didactics in teaching to a multifaith audience of Chaplains at hospitals, Veteran's Hospital and Nursing Homes and for community organizations. In addition, he has witnessed violence in its penultimate state during the war in Viet Nam and joins others who believe in peaceful resolutions by asking, "War? What is it good for?" Absolutely nothing.

SUMMATION

There is a utility question connected to the lack of gender equity in all the Abrahamic faiths. Indeed the use of the phrase “gender equality” – a polite term that is used to describe what really is male-biased behavior toward women. The term gender inequality is used so frequently by the press that I’m using the term to provide some insight to a broader audience that I wish to share with. In reality violence against women has many different aspects, physical, spiritual, economic, psychological – and the list is not exhausted. We wanted to investigate the spiritual effects of misogyny and patriarchy as projected in the Abrahamic faith with advice from those who shared an interest in my project. Some health issues that kept me bed-ridden directed my interest to the Islamic faith. In Islam this notion of misogyny, in many instances this misdirection is maintained and expanded upon by many leaders, scholars; therefore making backward notions of treatment of the “other” (women and children) an innovation in religion and utterly contemptible as a means of social inclusiveness. One way of engaging those devoted to an extreme and restricted position toward gender equality that I have learned, through the extensive review required for this project, that denouncing their viewpoint as immoral or even a misinterpretation of the Arabic in the Qur’an is fruitless. Many of the adherents of the viewpoint that woman and children’s viewpoints are less important or of no account sincerely believe this position and to brand them wrong is ingested as an insult and a non-starter toward any kind of reconciliation or meeting at least half-way.

These conflicts were due to personality flaws or approaches that were generated by my own commitment to what I perceived as an egregious wrong that needed correction. My intentions are good, my former methodology was incorrect; I perceived that the resistance, in some quarters, was due to a personality clash because the argument that was defined as a discussion evolved around different schools of thought (Jurisprudence). (There are four schools in Sunni Islam and four schools of thought of the Shia'ites that makes up approximately 15% of the total population of Islam while the other 85% are of the Sunni tradition and there is one lesser and obscure school. There is a long and controversial history between the two major groups the explanation of which would be another DMin project.) Another group that doesn't make the cut is the Sufi, and I'm referring to the Islamic tradition of Sufi or more accurately the *Tariqa*. The Sufi don't make distinctions between the various sects, with an outreach that is hallmarked by compassion and service to humankind, they follow the conical law while engaging in extra practices usually after congregational prayers on Friday and throughout the week. Their temperament ranges from the ultra-peaceful to those who strive in the way of *Allah* by any means necessary.

In reference to women, Muslims need to strive for the middle course and employ some of the compassion from the Sufi while also maintaining some of the structure of the other schools of thought. In dealing with injustices perpetrated against Islam, we need to first look and observe are we perpetrating any injustices ourselves; are we committed to the fair treatment of women and children without reservation; do we want for our fellow Muslim (worshipper) what we want for ourselves? Without promoting inclusive rights for women, children and minorities the admonition to "stand firmly for justice even if it's

against yourself” becomes an empty statement that hypocritically rings a sour note whenever the Hafiz recites the *Surah Baqarah* during the *tarweii* prayers as part of the Ramadhan rituals, to make a mockery of the *Din* could be considered blasphemous and should be strongly avoided at all cost. We now need to think of ways to teach and educate the community to avoid this catastrophe. These teachings need to be offered to the youth of both sexes and the adults simultaneously in order to be effective. We need *khutbas*, classes, and presentations in order to motivate the community toward “the best example.” To be a Believer is to accept the challenges with grace and dignity to see it as a blessing to challenge us to overcome and be first to stand for Justice. We men owe a debt to bring women and children back into the fold completely without herding them into restricted areas and let them join their husbands and fathers in the prayer halls where they can observe the Imam recite the words of the Qur’an. Where are there any other instances where we ask people with sight to engage in a religious talk without sight of the speaker as a matter of practice?

The sustainability of Islam is its appeal to many different cultures and people from different walks of life; it presents strong evidence how adaptable Islam is in reality. This is one of the universal and particular appeals of Islam. Presently Islam has been given a blessing to promote the quality of peace and love through gender equality and put to rest this eternal conflict. In his “Farewell Khutbah”, Nabi (PBUH) stated that he feared no greater challenge for his community than the fair treatment of women.

Objectively we can now see why or do you think that your faith would have been verified by your verbalizing your faith alone; no you will certainly be tested. My Sisters and Brothers we have failed the test; however, there is time to correct all the harm that

has been done. Beginning by seeing all and each person as a creation of *Allah, Subhana Wa Ta Ala (God the Most High)*. Begin inside and extend it to the outside. By His Grace you may cast out the spell of that negative mode and change, Ma sha'Allah (If it pleases God, does not etch whatever mode you were in in stone).

Women's rights advocates attempted some actions that were not successful and the larger community of women (and men) did not buy into. Although there were many women and men that were sympathetic to the issue of women's rights few were comfortable with the notion of a woman leading the *Salah* for the congregational prayers on Friday. Without much education or debate on the topic a date was set and the event was held amidst a media circus without any serious follow-up – much to the chagrin of many Muslim social justice and women's rights advocates that were trying to get equal accommodation for women in the Masjids. The Sister (Amina Wadud) that was the poster child for the Sister-led *khutbah* and prayer is a renowned scholar and has written books and articles that have provided awareness and sensitivity to women's issues. A more balanced and engaging approach was presented by Women In Islam, their website includes a well-written article for “Women-Friendly Mosques.” The organization is led by Sisters Aisha Al Adiwya and Sarah Sayeed who not only discussed the issue; they also provide concrete steps on how Masajids can provide a comfortable and rewarding experience for women and children. (This document may be downloaded from their website free of charge). They present a compelling argument and one that is attractive to both sexes.

Many outsiders are confused about the debate of environmental equity and why that remains a big issue within the Muslim community. These issues in discussion took

many of my Christian colleagues by surprise – those who are engaged in “Building Bridges” projects after 9/11 with Muslim women. Many Muslim women who had been frustrated, stifled because they were not allowed a voice in the administration of the Mosque were immensely happy that someone wanted to hear their concerns as opposed to just baking cakes, serving food or being in placed in a restricted area (think reservation, jail, barrier) as opposed to being a free person and able to roam. This is not to say that women wanted to invade the men’s prayer space. If the prayers are not being conducted, let the forever restless children’s’ laughter fill the place instead of making it a prison for them too. We have provided *Dawah* (invitations) to the general community at large; we should have started with an inclusive *Dawah* for our own Muslim community. These behaviors are being spotlighted and coming under more scrutiny as the routine excuses wear thin. I was prohibited from passing out questionnaires for my project due to the fact of New York Police Department’s surveillance on NYC Mosques and caused some uneasiness regarding any kind of data collection, this attitude still exist today. Another of the questions that frequently came up was: “What was the purpose of differential treatment toward women?”

In the introduction to her book, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets*, Renita J. Weems speaks of the imagery of a mangled female body are used by the Prophets to make a connection with Israel.³⁹ She further claims that marriage “was a trope for contemplating God’s power and Israel’s punishment” for the prophets of the Hebrew Bible.”⁴⁰ To be clear women had been bartered, like livestock, before the

³⁹ Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 1-11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

Hebrew Bible codified it into a religious-like observance. She presents cogent examples how the institution was implemented and reinforced by self-serving entitlement by men, e.g. “fathers were compensated for their daughters’ compromised sexual status” (Deut 22:28- 29); “brothers avenged their sisters’ humiliation” (Genesis 34; 2 Samuel 13); “male cousins could broker the marriages of their cousins” (Esth. 2:5).⁴¹ All of these ideations permeated the later religions of Christianity and Islam. In the case of Islam many of the seeds of these thoughts were already dormant as pre-Islamic Arabia was described as a “super patriarchal society” where women for the most part didn’t have many rights. One of the missions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was to extend some of the rights of the privileged class to women, children and the “other.” A nobler concept was the realization that they had to view woman as another “human being” and extend rights to women that was never even considered in those days. Today some may look at that society 1400 years ago and castigate the social order of the early Muslim society.

Observing some of the practices of the early Muslim society, to be just, we would have to conclude that this was a society in development. If we compare that society to the American society, with a developmental gulf of 1400 years, we may need to redefine the term “super patriarchal” as it applies to a society in development and a society that’s allegedly an advanced society. Such problem areas as equal pay for equal work; men can obtain Viagra as part of their healthcare while women are deprived routine check-ups that has proven to save lives; women are coerced, by law, to submit to invasive body cavity procedures without consent or a doctor’s approval; homicides from Intimate Partners against women continue at an alarming rate; gun violence has the country in a siege

⁴¹ Ibid., 4.

mentality. Americans' behaviors tend to shift to staying home and watching movies, shows as the threat of mass homicides haunts many people and leads them to avoid closed in places. Our social order reinforces violence in general; our obsessions with big guns that shoot five hundred of rounds in a matter of seconds. "Violence appears to be as America as apple pie." So religion is not the only miscreant in these affairs; however, instead of perpetrating it, it seemed that religion would have played a role in teaching people how to resolve differences in a non-violent manner.

TETELESTAI

AN ENDNOTE

The debate in reference to gender continues without any clear end point. Phyllis Tribble in her hermeneutical analysis (methodological and topical clues of the story of the Bible) presents in her analysis of the Biblical Hebrew different interpretations of Biblical verses.⁴² She breaks away from the rigid and dogmatic interpretations that represent the approach before Biblical Inquiry became a legitimate field of study. Her work entitled *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* posits that designation of male and female does not indicate sexual differences.⁴³

Ronald J. Williams speaks to Masculine natural gender. “A masculine word may refer to a male person or animal (e.g. father, king).⁴⁴ Many words that are parsed as masculine refer to inanimate objects, for example “house, word, thing, and heart or moon may be masculine in one language and feminine in another. The fact that the word is masculine does not imply that the object is male or is thought to have male characteristics. Grammatical gender is also referred to as lexical gender.

In earlier psychological approach referred to Association Psychology which is totally incorporated by both Behavioral Psychology and Cognitive Psychology, we learn

⁴² Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁴³ Tribble, *God and The Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 80.

⁴⁴ Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 5.

by associations: the mother holds up the spoon and states “I have the spoon so it’s time to eat”. An association is made between sight of the spoon and awareness that it’s time to feed.

I’m maintain that there is a need for a gender neutral word for the Creator; that the often repeated “He” has an association that may prove offensive and place some outside of God’s grace by not being inclusive. The Seminary that I attended in the admission interview mentions this and I read it on their website and brochure before I decided to attend. I’m not as rigid in terms of denouncing a gender for God but I still tread lightly because I hear the cracking ice “waking round my feet.” Gender was created by God and therefore God cannot and should not be described as belonging to any gender. Allah knows best.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

A MANDATE FOR GENDER INCLUSION:
BARRIERS TO GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAM

BY

SHAYKH AL HAJJ TA BASHIR

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

February 1, 2014

Challenge Statement

As a Muslim clergy within the City of New York, I have observed the age-old negative behaviors of gender inequality in sacred spaces (Masjids) and how worshippers practice gender inequality and other superstitions as opposed to acts of kindness and mutual respect as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This demonstration project will create a Public Awareness Campaign on the topic of gender equality which is an antecedent to various other forms of abuse.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

The Mosque was founded 20 years ago by Imam Bilal in the South Jamaica area of Queens. It is situated on a block that has a grocery store, apartment buildings and a martial arts school on the opposite end of the block. Across the street is a low income project that is plagued by drugs, prostitution, drug dealing and unemployment for the youth. The Mosque is a storefront Mosque small but with warm intimate social interactions where everyone knows each other as opposed to some of the big mosques where one is just another stranger in the crowd and there is no social interaction to speak of. The name of the Mosque is *Al Hamdulillah* (The Praise belongs to God); they invite the community in when they have events and feed the people wholesome food (halal). The response is positive and many of the people ask questions about diet, health, religion and other issues that may be of concern. The Imam has run for City Council twice; but after 9/11 it is difficult for Muslims to be in the public-eye without suspicion, distrust and animosity.¹ The Mosque is a member of the “Majlis Ash-Shura”, the leadership council of New York City; and is composed of African Americans, Guyanese and Pakistani Mosques that interact on holidays, civil protests, and educational trainings but do not visit each other’s homes or rarely intermarry.

¹ Zahid H. Bukhair, Sulayman S. Hyang, Muntaz Ahmad and John L. Esposito, *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004).

We all believe that:

Allah is God (The One and Only)
Allah the Eternal, Absolute
God begets not nor is God begotten
And there is none like unto God (Surah 112, Quran)

The Mosque provides the following ceremonies according to the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) and the law: marriage, birth, burial (*Janaaza*), counseling, educational programs, holiday observances, picnics, school for children, etc. This is all supported by the members through *sadaqa* (alms) giving. They are in the process of developing a television show to be broadcasted locally. Presently they are renovating the Mosque: updating the electrical wiring to sustain larger air conditioners, provide more lighting and improve the functioning of the toilets. They have placed new rugs throughout the building on all floors and replaced the drywall. This work continues. They hope to have a presentable place and invite other faith leaders and politicians to speak at the Mosque.

Masjid Al Hamdulillah is a primarily an African American institution that provides for fifty families and others who may need to pray in that area. Friday *Jumma* serves approximately one hundred women and men.

It is open throughout the week and observes the five daily prayers. Women who could not obtain divorces from other Masjids seek out the leadership here because there is support for women on some issues that other Masjids are reluctant to get involved in. To get married both parties must have an Aids/HIV test. Although some men balked, many women appreciated being supported from this deadly disease where women may feel awkward. There is one *Jumma* service during Friday prayers, but two prayers for the *Eid* (festivals) celebrations, one early at morning and a later prayer at 9 A.M. with a short *khutba* (sermon) Presented at each of these.

The Mosque has lead the way for HIV/AIDS education because of the plague of those diseases in this community; we stepped out of our religious dogmatic role and taught Muslims and the community about safe sex and other risky behaviors despite the objections of the rigidly held opinions by some Muslims. They were able to reach where city agencies were unable to and our credibility added to our ability to reach the people. They provided many AIDS educational programs. The “Department of Health of The State of New York” heard of our work and attended one of our interfaith presentations on “Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Substance Abuse” and recommended us to the City Council for funding; we received a small grant to support our work in this community

That grant was terminated without notice; the residual backlash that American Muslims are subjected to as a result of 9/11; however, by the grace of God we were able to sustain our outreach and services. Due to the fact that we are small in numbers the termination of our grant put a huge dent in our budget but we manage to continue our services in a community that has been devastated by drugs and disease.

They have a school for the children that teach the fundamentals of Islam, recitation of Quran, writing and reading Arabic, tutoring in math and reading. They are building a seniors’ emergency food pantry that in case of any emergency they will be able to provide sundry items.

The Masjid is predominately African American; with Africans and Pakistanis that pray there on Fridays for *Jummah* services. No African or Pakistani women attend; the women are all African American. This is due to the deep racial and cultural divide that is a part of Muslims’ behavior—except at public functions where etiquette demands that we behave as one.

They do have visiting Imams from other Masjids deliver the *khutba* as invited *khatibs* (religious speakers); this adds religious diversity and insight into meaning and understanding of the Quran. Most of these sermons reflect the conservative, patriarchal point of view; usually women do not give khutbahs and there is no forum where women can present their knowledge on a regular basis. Women scholars have taken to the pen to remind many of the statements in the Quran and that one of the acts of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the liberation of women in a super-patriarchal society; this was very risky because many of the men were not open to social change nor were they ecstatic about losing a major source of income by devouring women's inheritance.²

At the time of the Quran's revelation, sixth-century Arabia was experiencing an enormous socio-anthropological flux in the region in general, and more specifically, in the Hejaz.

While Arabian society had a number of distinct matriarchal features, these were now being replaced by a wholly patriarchal system. Muslims in general hold that this was a period when women were regarded as not only socially but as 'slaves and cattle'... It was a time when women basically inherited nothing but were themselves inherited. They were part of their husband's property to be owned by his heirs or other men of his tribe. It was a mark of dishonor for any man to have a daughter and many preferred to bury their female children rather than face social opprobrium.³

Although not as blatant as projected in the pre-Islamic days much of these attitudes filtered into the religion and became an impediment and therefore disregarded to the practitioners Islam. Due to the sway of orthodox conservative religious authorities who maintained a fixed and rigid interpretation in the sphere of the treatment of women,

² Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³ Farid Esack, *The Quran: a Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 180-181.

Islam has remained and has reverted into a cave ⁴ since the death of the Prophet in terms of equal treatment to women. We question whether Islam is a detrimental force in the lives of women.

So we state, emphatically, that Islam, like its sister religions Judaism and Christianity, is not patriarchal at its base; however, men dominating the interpretations of the texts and enforcing their interpretation on the text, usually through violence, have reduced many aspects of the religion to a misogynistic cult, that politically disenfranchises women and children, and a requisite body grooming that can also debilitate a women.⁵ These are some of the aspects that deny woman equal treatment in sacred spaces; what is even more appalling is the fact many men in leadership positions and the laity believe that this is the way to practice Islam in conformity with a crime that remains entrenched as part of the gender recidivism that took place after the death of the prophet (PBUH) and his *Sahaabas* (companions). Today other religions are trying to balance the scale to some extent.

Christianity and the Judaism have attempted to correct this by recognizing women as ministers and rabbis but once accepted there is another struggle for women due to the dominant power structure in most religious institutions remains men. If men are unable to then recognize women as equal partners what does that say to the transformative quality of religion. Islam has yet to reach that pinnacle and a fierce struggle continues as to women's place in religious service within Islam has yet to be defined or implemented in

⁴ Plato, "Allegory of The Cave," *Republic*, VII, section 514 a to 517 a, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D7%3Asection%3D514a>, (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵ Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 166.

nearly 1400 years. The loss of spiritual input from women robs Islam of spiritual insight that is a gift from God.

Although the negating of women's religious services specifically in rituals and sermons; more immediately, the Masjid itself needs to welcome sisters and their children with more than mere words but environmental structures that demonstrates an awareness for their concerns. Maintaining women as "other" presents an atmosphere where full human rights are denied and inhumane behaviors are condoned and identified as domestic disputes as opposed to Domestic Violence; but, it is more than that there is a rearrangement of the abused person's spiritual superstructure. When one's belief in a most powerful entity and that entity is spiritually impotent and unable to redirect, suppress or eliminate the traumatic pain experienced it becomes more than just hope that sustains belief in this entity. That hope becomes translated into "Is there something/ anything to hold on?" It also sets a platform for investigating these phenomena that has lasted for too long.⁶

⁶ Islamic Social Services Association and Women In Islam, "Women Friendly Mosques and Community Centers: Working Together to Reclaim Our Heritage," <http://www.islamawareness.net/Mosque/WomenAndMosquesBooklet.pdf> (accessed January 18, 2014).

CHAPTER 2 PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

Challenge Statement

As a Muslim clergy within the City of New York, I have observed the age-old negative behaviors of gender inequality in sacred spaces (Masjids) and how worshippers practice gender inequality and other superstitions as opposed to acts of kindness and mutual respect as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This demonstration project will create a Public Awareness Campaign on the topic of gender equality which is an antecedent to various other forms of abuse to women. May Allah accept our efforts, Amin.

Recently there has been a sustained effort by Islamic scholars both female and male on the status of women in Islam. Unfortunately much of this debate becomes a dichotomy between the female perspective and the male perspective as opposed to a unitary view that presents a just and humane view of the *Quran* that treats all humans as equal and interjects compassion and understanding of the issues that we as humans must endure. The concerns of women have been either ignored or presented from a male perspective often defined as patriarchy.

Patriarchy is a systematic devaluation of the worth and value of women. Patriarchy involves the political process of constructing gender supremacy from biological difference. Ideologically the transformation of male to man, and female to woman, occurs in such a way that man is prioritized while woman is rendered different (synonymous with unequal) less than, or other. Patriarchy is not primary or causal in the development of other forms of human oppression. Moreover, it is not an overarching framework that adequately encompasses other forms of oppression such as class or race. Women experience patriarchy vastly differently depending upon

their race, class and other social markers of identity that are different from, and interact with, their gender identity.⁷

Some of the horrific murders that took place in Islam motivated me to study and learn about Islam and its position on women. In the beginning I focused on “Honor Killings” and how it was religiously justified throughout the world; how shocking to uncover that it was illegally practiced in the United States, Great Britain, Germany and other Western countries as reported by the media. This is a pre-Islamic cultural behavior that has more to do with “acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female members, who are held to have brought dishonor to upon the family. In a survey by the BBC’s Asian Network, 1 in 10 of the 500 Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims surveyed said they would condone any murder of someone who threatened their family’s honor.

As gruesome as this sounds, Black women were lynched, shot and killed for being related to someone that a lynch mob either sought or imprisoned;⁸ a mother raped and lynched for her son’s misdeeds.⁹ This is where race and sex intersects—the tragedy for Black women was that they themselves were brutalized for the color of their skin and their sex; in addition, the majority of lynchings were inflicted on Black men who were the husbands, brothers and sons of these Black women. How long does it take to erase collective traumatic memories, where were the reparations for these crimes against humanity. Where white men and women went to church on Sunday and many pretended to be religious after mistreating their co-religionist in the same faith.

⁷ Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 5.

⁸ Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1996), 110.

⁹ Ibid., 96; 175.

Notwithstanding this behavior of torching and lynching was carried out on white Christian women as well. The state, under the guise of witch hunting, persecuted and tortured women who were folk healers and midwives. The state identified groups as enemies: heretics, Jews, lepers, homosexuals and to create the myths that would enable rulers to destroy those groups.¹⁰ More women than men were accused of witchcraft or heresy; therefore, more women were murdered. These women were tortured, often murdered while awaiting trial.¹¹ These same tactics and rationale are being used by Christian fanatics to characterized Islam today—"The best Muslim is a dead Muslim."

She states that

Mass panics for which the Catholic Germans lands were famous were made by two beliefs. The first, that Satan intended to destroy Christian civilization and require hordes of witches to do so, led to the 'conspiracy theory' of witchcraft, in which sorcery was seen as treason (sedition against the state), as an attempt to overthrow state and church; fear was concomitantly intense. The second followed from this: that therefore witchcraft was so heinous a crime that the use of torture was justified.¹² (

In the 21st century we can replace witches with jihadists and justified torture with Abu Graib, Guantanamo Bay, and other "Black Ops" in Afghanistan. (It was reported by local news outfits that Sheik Muhammad, the so-called mastermind of 9/11 was water-boarded 183 times and still refused to talk or give useful information.)

So we arrive at the conclusion that torture is instrumental by the state (usually men) to any person(s) or group(s) that is perceived as a threat to the state's authority. Women are forced to live up to an unrealistic ideal and if they do not remain in these

¹⁰ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco: Pandora, 1994), 39.

¹¹ Ibid., 23.

¹² Ibid., 61.

prescribed boundaries they encountered severe social reactions from society (men) that include economic deprivation, social restrictions, physical and verbal abuse and death at the hands of their intimate partners, relatives and sometimes their sons. The state being the chief of operations for most of this mayhem directed toward women.

Delores S. Williams, in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, states:

The Virgin Mary as a social construct has stood for purity and innocence, which were qualities assigned to white women. Black women were construed by white social mythology to be loose, immoral, and incapable of either innocence or purity. Thus the Virgin Mary can be a negative symbol for Black women: “too white” and “too false” to represent what is acceptably (Black) female.¹³

There is no denying the compatibility of African-American women’s reality with Chung’s statement that “when Mary is placed as a norm for ‘ideal womanhood’ outside of Asian women’s everyday, concrete, bodily experience, she becomes a source for disempowerment for Asian Women.”¹⁴ In fairness this ideal that she speaks of is equally unattainable by white women; as they too are the victims of psychological and physical abuse for not obtaining this “ideal norm.”

These norms are implicit in the “power and control” mechanisms that are the basis of misogynistic behaviors. Misogamy appears to not be the cause of these behaviors but a deep down rooted suspicion, mistrust and paranoia-like response to interaction with their intimate partners to maintain “power and control.” This control was necessary to

¹³ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 180.

¹⁴ Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women’s Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 76.

give the women to other men, without their consent, for social and material favors (today this behavior is called “pimping”).

Gayle Rubin argues that

The organization of people into social groups may have started when men began to exchange their sisters and daughters for the sisters and daughters of other men... And as a result of these gift transactions, certain people became “kin.” However, since women were not partners to the exchange but, rather, the objects traded, they were denied the social rights and privileges created by these acts of giving.¹⁵

These behaviors appear to be almost universal among patrilineal groups, the giving of daughters and other female relatives to other men. The language reveals some of it: Now we pronounced you “man and wife”. (Men keep their status while woman is sentenced to be objectified as wife to death do they part, much different from “I pronounce you woman and man.”) The language used in the marriage ceremony reveals subtle power and control ideations where the woman is objectified (wife) and the man maintains his humanity.

Ahmed states in *Women and Gender in Islam* that “the subordination of women in the ancient Middle East appears to have been institutionalized with the rise of urban societies and with the rise of the archaic state in particular.”¹⁶ She repudiates the androcentric theories based on biology and “nature” that women are inferior to men. Citing a Neolithic settlement in Asia Minor dating from circa 6000 bce, she explains how the “larger burial platforms found in the houses contained women, and the paintings and

¹⁵ Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 131.

¹⁶ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 11.

decorations on the walls of the numerous shrines prominently featured women.”¹⁷ The mother-goddess was venerated in a number of Middle Eastern cultures in the Neolithic period, including Mesopotamia, Elam, Egypt and Crete, Greece and Phoenicia.¹⁸

The patriarchal family, designed to guarantee the paternity of property-heirs and vesting in men the control of female sexuality, became institutionalized, codified. Women’s sexuality was designated the property of men, first of the women’s father [*notice that in marriages in this society the father ‘gives the bride away’ to another man*], then of her husband and female sexual purity (virginity in particular) became negotiable, economically valuable property. This led (some have argued) to the emergence of prostitution and to the enforcement of a rigid demarcation between ‘respectable’ women (wives), whose sexuality and reproductive capability belonged to one man, and women who were sexually available to any man.¹⁹

“Code Hammurabi (circa 1752 B.C.E) limited the time for which a man could pawn his wife or children to three years and expressly forbade beating or oppressing these debt-pawns.”²⁰ Women could only obtain a divorce with great difficulty and if the reasons for the divorce were false she could be thrown in the water (to drown). If a man raped a virgin, due to the economic hardship he placed on her father (virgins then and now command a higher bride-price), the rapist would have to pay the father the price of a virgin and to marry the woman he had raped.²¹ This also motivated prospective partners to satisfy their inclinations to one another in creative ways in order that they can present for observation, a blood-stained sheet that was evidence of the virgin status; this deception is not only practiced by Muslims.

¹⁷ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Ibid., 14.

These codes set the tone in attitudes toward women and filtered through the Abrahamic religions that used various Semitic languages which Wesley Muhammad, in *God's Black Prophets*, argues it is not a racial designation. He concludes, that what is called the "Near East is part of Saharo-Nilotic ethno-cultural elements" and "that what is known as the Near East is more properly thought of as Africa's 'North East extension,' because geologically and geographically, that is in fact what it is."²²

According to Danna Reynolds:

The indigenous or "Black" tribes of Arabia were those who in ancient times migrated from Africa... and were the earliest purveyors and dispersers of the Semitic dialects. The Semitic family of languages, the most widespread is Arabic, is a branch of a larger language phylum called Afro-asiatic.²³

Culture is easily spread by language. Although there were variations between Semitic languages much of the culture remained intact and in some cases was rigidly enforced by religious codes that are still extent today. We find that religion and language reinforces the treatment of women as other. How/or did that change in modern times?

Jamal Badawi, in *Gender Equity in Islam* discusses gender equity under four broad headings:²⁴

The Spiritual Aspects

The Economic Aspects

The Social Aspects

The Political and Legal Aspect

²² Wesley Muhammad, *God's Black Prophets: Deconstructing the Myth of the White Muhammad of Arabia and Jesus of Jerusalem* (Atlanta, GA: A-Team Publishing, 2010), 38-39, notes 101,102.

²³ Ibid., 39,40; Dana Reynolds, "The African Heritage and Ethnology of the Moors: Background to the Emergence of Early Berber and Arab Peoples, from prehistory to the Islamic Dynasties," in *Golden Age of the Moor*, ed. Ivan Van Sertima (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 1992).

²⁴ Jamal A. Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam* (Falls Church, VA: World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 1995).

We take a strong exception to his social prescription that

Allows for a husband to administer a gentle pat to his wife that causes no physical harm to the body nor leaves any sort of mark. It may in some cases, bring to the wife's attention the seriousness of her continued unreasonable behavior (refraction).²⁵

The proof for this kind of violence is not, I repeat, not in the Quire's or the Hadith traditions. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) never resorted to beating as a way to resolve differences with members of his household. Muslims are obligated to follow the examples set forth by Rasullulah. Are we to believe that only women caused trouble in the marriage and men are correct all the time? By prescribing corrective actions for one gender for social infractions and not the other; he promotes a colossal blunder, in terms of gender equality, to astronomical proportions.

He does not prescribe a corrective prescription to be employed by women when the men behave incorrectly. This fact alone demonstrates the depth of the misogynistic ideations of this author and consequently we cannot even estimate how many Muslims have been misled by his writings into thinking that the mistreatment of women is part of the religion of Islam and that there is not a need for equality.

He pushes the conservative viewpoint that the men are in charge (power and control initiatives), that women and men are not equal partners in their marriage. After beating the women he advocates for divorce as the "last resort." No need for drama here: if you are going to cut someone off would it not be better to do it before you beat them up? Let's be truthful. The divorce was pursued because the physical violence did not yield the desired result. These are the dreadful behaviors that have women on guard with potential and actual husbands.

²⁵ Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam*, 25.

Women are often treated with disrespect in the Masjid itself, sit in the back of the Masjids with curtains obstructing their view of the speaker and diminishing the non-verbal communications cues of the speaker, some places the private facilities are in poor shape, and in others women are not allowed in the main prayer hall.

In the shadows these issues are sometimes discussed, rarely in the open. Those men who do discuss them are considered eccentric and those women who do are defined as having the Islamic equivalent of “penis-envy” in not so polite terms. The youth today are questioning these double standards directed at their mothers and sisters, and find that the answers often do not make sense as they strive to find the “wisdom behind the commands” to marginalize women. As Islam is being attacked externally by some in the media for behaviors that have nothing to do with the religion of Islam; and also, internally for practices that are *bidaa'* (innovations) without any precedent. Islam can revive itself by being inclusive and remaining patient in the face of adversity.

CHAPTER 3 PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 1: Raise the awareness of the need for gender equality.

Strategy 1- Present to at least three audiences about gender inequality and

Domestic Violence in collaboration with the Interfaith Center (IFC) at 475
Riverside Drive.

Strategy 2 - Give two *khutbas* (sermons) on gender inequality and its relation to
Domestic Violence at Masjid Alhamdulillah.

- The sermon will focus on a linguistic exploration of the word “*Daraba*” that is frequently misinterpreted by misogynistic translators as giving men permission to beat their wives. This word appears approximately 50 times in the *Qur'an* and is never used to describe “beating the wife”. Indeed based on what proceeds it would be defined as “travel away from” (Fatwa by Shaykh Kabbani on the prohibitions of DV).
- It will also focus on punishments prescribed for women by some scholars while none are prescribed for men for the same offenses.
- It will also discuss that on the Hajj in the Haram (one of the holiest Masjid sites in Saudi Arabia) women and men often pray side by side and disregard the action of women praying in the rear.

Strategy 3 - Host dinners and provide Didactics to hospital chaplains that will include the following DVD, “In the Man Box” this depicts, graphically incidents, patriarchy in everyday life.

Goal 2 - Build a team.

- Identify interfaith project partners at community organizations that I have established a relationship with and have worked with in the area of educating about social justice.
- Meet with partners or have phone contact with them to begin collaborations as much as schedule will allow.

- Identify and recruit volunteers to be interview regarding their experiences with DV (3).

Goal 3 - I will attend at least three DV trainings and workshop.

Strategy 1 - Review trainings and certify that they are compatible with Islamic teaching (*Quran* and *Sunnah*)

Strategy 2 - Research and teach relevant texts, and other materials, that promotes universal gender compatibility and explore the verse referred hermeneutically and exegetically for meaning in context to a pluralistic community and reject the conservative patriarchal view that maintain inequality: women's status as "other" even when the texts does not state that they are.

Strategy 3 - Listen to the stories of women without interrupting or redirecting; in other words, learning to give up some of my male privileges in order to hear the other side clearly.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. *Are Muslim men allowed to discipline (beat) their wives?*

Shaykh M. Hisham Kabbani and Homayra Zaid state that the notion of “wife-beating” in Islam revolves around only a single verse (actually a single word) of the Holy *Qur'an* (4:34). Here are two typical translations of the verse.

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill conduct, (first) admonish them; (next) refuse to share their beds; (*and last*) *beat them (lightly)*. But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance) for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).²⁶

Men are in charge of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women).²⁷ So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, *and scourge them*. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.²⁸

The translations do not agree with each other except for men's false superiority over women.

²⁶ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corp, 1983).

²⁷ Note that parenthesis are used whenever the translator wants to imply a persuasion or ideation that is usually not part of the text for example the word strength can also be interpreted as different obligations than the other, this changes the entire meaning from a patriarchal statement to one that is just and fair. Example: women have babies and are responsible for suckling the infant. This is a “different obligation” that a man can never fill.

²⁸ Marmaduke William Pickhall, and 'Arafāt Kāmil 'Ashshī, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana, 2005).

According to Zaid and Kabbani one word invokes intense controversy:

w'adribuhunna from the 'Arabic verb "*daraba*." They state:

Some scholars argue that the word in this context does not mean "beat" or "hit"; it means just "leave (them)." But it is obvious, and Allah knows best, that the word stands for "punishment."²⁹

They further go on to state..."

Such scholars qualify the verb 'beat' by the adverb 'lightly' as in the above translation by Yusuf Ali to mitigate the harshness of the punishment they perceive in this verse. However, even this translation is misleading because it reinforces a faulty assumption that the Quran stipulates any form of physical violence towards one's spouse.³⁰

This one word has caused women much misery due to the fact that some men have believed that beatings one's wife is religiously sanctioned. Another victim of this word are the Imams or their delegates that have to intervene in cases of DV when they are aware that the word has been misinterpreted and one session is not going to convince the batterer that his argument rest on a faulty premise. The Masjid needs to include safety in its general women's meeting and also in its general men's meeting. This training needs to be conducted by someone familiar with the dynamics of DV and has been trained to intervene.

We conclude by posing a question: What procedures should a wife employ if her husband was derelict in his marital duties? Apparently these scholars have no solution or refuse to offer one for the wayward husband who is allowed give out punishment with impunity.

²⁹ Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, and Homayra Ziad, *The Prohibition Of Domestic Violence in Islam* (Washington, D.C.: World Organization for Resource Development and Education, 2011).

³⁰ Ibid.

2. *If women are not allowed to present from the **mimbar** (pulpit), where does the Islamic community hear the spiritual insight, inspiration and thoughts of women?*

Maintaining a bar of segregation against women sharing their spirituality has proven in many instances to be a major mistake that has plunged Muslims into harsh and brutal behaviors instead of nurturing one that would bring Muslim children closer to us. It nullifies the *Basmala: Most Gracious, Most Merciful* (part of the beginning statement of Muslims prayers at least 17 times a day) as we turn toward our co-religionists and restrict their verbal, rituals and acts of worship on the illogicality of anatomy despite creation from the same Creator.

3. *In the Prophet's (PBUH) last **khuba** what was his warning to the Muslims?*

He stated that he feared no greater trial to his people than the fair treatment of women. Throughout his ministry he strongly advocated for women, orphans, those who were turned out and the poor. Keeping with the Prophet's (PBUH) last request, to treat women fairly, would place Islam on a worldwide course toward the full liberation and emancipation of God's creature. Setting a true example of God's love in action for the entire world, first we have to invite women as full participants in our worship structures, involve them in the decision making process, allow them to speak and address the Muslims; in short, empower them.

CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION PROCESS

1. The effect will take place in interviews with women.
2. Questionnaires with Muslims Scholars.
3. DVD presentation of an “in vivo” discussion of Muslim women and men addressing the issues related to DV.

The death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) signaled the end of the drive for the uplift of women in Arabia. Shortly after his death, the negative aspect of inequality began to settle in, once again, in the society. Some of the major advances by the Prophet (PBUH) were his concerns for equality as witnessed by:

1. He made reading mandatory for women, to the consternation of many of the men, in Arabia. Women, like slaves, usually did not receive education and therefore could not read, he made it mandatory for all Muslim to read the *Qur'an*. A practice that is not adhered to today.
2. For the first time in history, women were allowed to receive their inheritance, children also. Inheritances were usually eaten up by male relatives and were a form of acquiring wealth for men from women and children.
3. Women had the right to divorce and to keep what they earned. This was not possible under the former system. In addition, women were given the right to voice their opinions.

These are just a few of the social modification that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) implemented and because of this he faced great opposition from the aristocracy down to the common man. The opposition was so great that some decided to get rid of him and revert to the “ways of our father” the battle cry of patriarchy.

The word *Fuqua* generally means scholar and is from the same root *sufaha* one with diminished mental capacity. Reza Aslan on the heels of Fatima Mourners, reports how the definition of the word *sufaha* was changed after the death of the Prophet to mean women and children. This change in definition allowed the men, once again, to devour the property of woman and orphan children

Secondly, *Hadiths* began to appear whose *Isnad* (chain of narrations) were highly suspect and rejected by the scholars. Many of these *Hadith* began to announce a reverting to the ways of old where men of privilege would once again restore the privileges they lost during the mission of the Prophet (PBUH).

Thirdly, when institutions of learning were established women were forbidden to enter these institutions despite the fact that women were the producers of reliable *Hadiths* and were scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and history.

Many of the sparks from the flame of patriarchy still exist within Islam today and provide the primary motivation for the differential treatment meted out to women and children. As the world community got smaller and African Americans began to intermix with Muslims from all over the world they learned that gender inequality was consistent with religion and women were the gateway to hell due to physiological functions and men were superior due to anatomical structures, misinterpreting of the Qur'an and misogynistic commentaries that failed to hold up the Quranic ideal of equality. Islam has a host of issues internally and externally; there is a need to resolve the internal issues and unify the community under the banner of equality, not to just tolerate differences but to accept them in a pluralistic society. *La kum Dinal uKm we Liya Din*, "to you be your and to me be mine."

CHAPTER 6

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

The Process

All members of the Site Team participated in providing insight into the process. They are Shaykh Abdullah Adhami, Dr. Nuurah Armatullah, Dr. Sally N. MacNichols, Imam Abdus Salaam Musa, CPE Supervisor. We have had many in-person and phone conversations. Our talks on this project started with my acceptance to NYTS and are ongoing. The team gave me their assessment verbally and I present from those conversations their assessments.

The Assessments

1. Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition.

Bashir is knowledgeable about the history of Islam the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and has studied the African American history of Islam from Africa to America and has shared this knowledge in *khutba's* and lectures. He is an executive officer of the American Indigenous Islamic- CPE, a consultant for the Secretary General of The Council of African Imams in America, an advocate for women rights, providing Domestic Violence counseling to the Muslims and the community at large.

2. Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions.

Bashir has knowledge of other religions, especially Christianity and Judaism by studying Comparative Religions and participating in Interfaith organizations He frequently interweaves the texts of other religions within his speeches. He also

demonstrates the similarity of the Abrahamic faiths. Due to his interest in the ministry of Jesus (AS) he attends Christian sermons and attempts to breakdown the wall that separates Muslims from Christians.

3. Ability to engage productively in dialogue.

He engages in multifaith dialogue and has taught in immigrant *Masjids* and invited them to the American way of life. He is invited to dialogue in Interfaith assemblies and is known for his even and friendly demeanor that goes over well with members of other religions that may not know Muslims on a personal basis. He has given major speeches for national Domestic Violence Organizations. He seeks more everyday knowledge from other religions that he shares in his *khutba's* and lectures. He calls this his "peace initiative."

4. Ability to interpret sacred texts.

His exegetical pronouncements were always devoted toward gender equality but have become sharper in the last year and a half. He uses a common sense approach in his speeches with humor. He will discuss some of his "aha" moments. He is able to bring *pathos* without abandoning *logos* and maintaining *ethos* throughout his talks. He has rejected the forever repeated "He" as he stated that God is free of gender. By referring to God as "He" excludes half of the human race as part of God. Bashir believes this and encourages others to use non-gendered terms when referring to God.

5. Ability as a worship leader.

Bashir has conducted the prayers using Arabic and English, he has based his *khutba* on Qur'anic passages, *Hadith* and *Tafsirs* (commentary on the sacred

texts). He spends time after the service in dialogue with members of the *Masjid*. He has provided prayers for Interfaith gatherings. At times roaring like a lion and other times soft and reverent like prayer. Bringing a grasp of knowledge that bridges traditions, he provides a knowledgeable and informative speech. He is a gifted speaker, with a powerful voice and commands attention. He is well received by the Muslims and others whenever he speaks.

6. Facilitating transformation

Bashir remains intrepid and bold in his *minhajj* (journey) for gender equality. This has diminished his reception in some circles within the Muslim community. He continues to “speak truth to power” and continues to bring others into the conversation. He does not follow an era extremist vs. interpretation of Islam, he believes that Islam must be viewed in context with a pluralistic society(peaceful co-existence with neighbors) not by the dynamics of the agrarian Arabian society from 1400 hundred years ago; believing despite that the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are still applicable in context to today’s society.

7. Ability as multifaith leader.

He is able to participate wherever God is held in esteem. He does not single out people of different faith or those who lack faith. He has given talks requesting the rights of women and immigrants be granted. Being able to meet on common ground with others has often put him in the role of peacemaker in his own community. To be able to listen to different issues, be just and impartial remains one his gifts. (Allah has stated in the *Qur'an*, “Stand up firmly for Justice even if it’s against yourself, your family or kin.”

8. Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator

Bashir has demonstrated his strong belief by teaching against Gender Inequality (an antecedent to DV) in multifaith settings despite the entrenched ideations of gender inequality in his own religion; he preaches and teaches in his community also in multifaith congregations. He has provided Didactics in teaching to a multifaith audience at hospitals and for community organizations. In addition, he has witnessed violence its penultimate state the war in Viet Nam and joins others who believe in peaceful resolutions by asking, "War? What is it good for?" Absolutely nothing.

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APPENDIX B
CONNECT NYC LETTERS AND WEBSITE



CONNECT

127 West 127th Street, Rm. 431 New York, NY 10027

P 212 683 0015 • F 212 683 0016 • connect@connectnyc.org

June 14, 2013

Shaykh T. A. Bashir
100 Fisher Ave.
White Plains, NY 10606

Dear Shaykh Bashir:

Thank you so much for your generous contribution toward CONNECT's 10th Anniversary Celebration and Fundraiser on Monday, May 13th. We can't express how much your support means to us. You are making it possible for us to continue to educate, provide advocacy for those who need it, and sustain long-term strategies to eliminate interpersonal violence and foster safe families and peaceful communities.

We know from experience that lasting transformation comes from collaboration and partnerships with individuals like you who are dedicated and passionate about social justice. This is why we are so grateful that so many of you came out to support our fundraiser.

Throughout the year we will have several additional events to honor our past successes and look ahead to new and exciting programs that move us closer to the realization of our vision of a society based on mutuality, respect and social justice where institutions are accountable, communities are peaceful, families are safe and individuals are empowered. We will keep you posted!

Thank you again for your gift to CONNECT of **\$100**. Please know that ***your donation makes a difference*** because it enables us to continue the work that we do.

Your gift is fully tax deductible. No goods or services were provided in exchange for your contribution. This letter shall serve as your receipt.

With much gratitude,

Sally N. MacNichol
Co-Executive Director

Quentin Walcott
Co-Executive Director



CONNECT

127 West 127th Street, Rm. 431, New York, NY 10027

P 212 683 0015 • F 212 683 0016 • connect@connectnyc.org

Jan. 21, 2014

Shaykh T.A. Bashir
House of Peace
405 Tarrytown Road # 1096
White Plains, NY 10607

Dear Shaykh Bashir,

Thank you for agreeing to become CONNECT's consultant on Domestic violence in Muslim Communities. Your dedication, skill, understanding and expertise will greatly enrich CONNECT Faith's work to build the capacity of faith communities to prevent and respond to domestic violence, especially in the Muslim communities in this city.

CONNECT staff, and more importantly the people and communities that we serve, have already benefitted greatly from our partnership with you -- from the educational forums you have participated in, to the trainings you have conducted with New York City's Imams, to your help with complex cases that have come to our legal advocacy program. Your contribution to the work has been invaluable.

So, we are formalizing a relationship that has already borne great fruits! We look forward to many years of justice making and peacemaking to come. We are confident that someone with your respected knowledge, expertise, and involvement in the Muslim community will help us to achieve our organizational mission and vision.

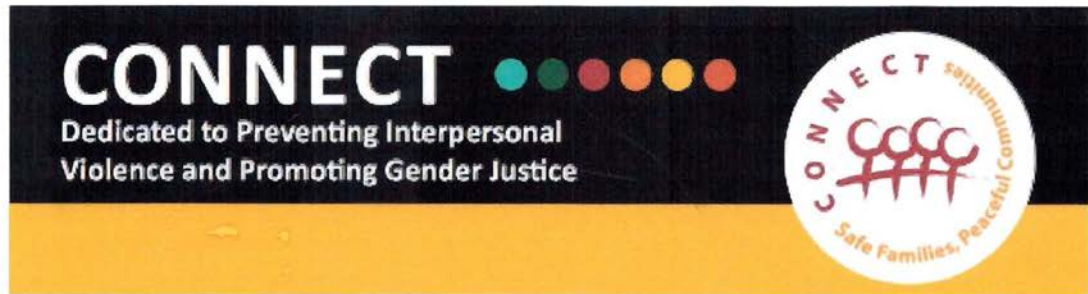
If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at (212) 683-0015 Ext. 216/225 or by email: smacnichol@connectnyc.org and/or qwalcott@connectnyc.org.

With much respect and gratitude,

Sally N. MacNichol
Co-Executive Director

Quentin Walcott
Co-Executive Director

From: Q, Sally and all at CONNECT <connect@connectnyc.org>
To: tabcib <tabcib@aol.com>
Subject: Thank you for CONNECTing NYC
Date: Wed, Nov 20, 2013 10:41 am



Dear Ta,

2013 is almost at an end. And we wanted to take a moment to share all the things that you have helped us do. **Like transform how 8,500 New Yorkers think and act around violence in our most intimate relationships.**

That's 8,500 strides towards safer families, and more peaceful communities.

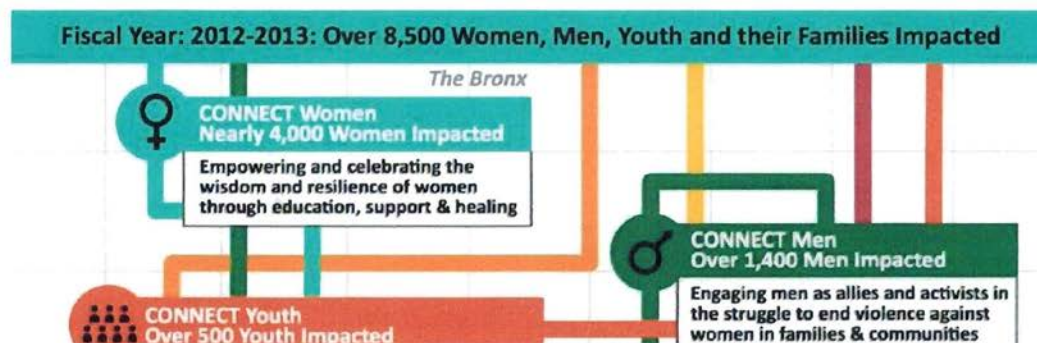
The image below shows where and how we've been working - across all the different boroughs and with all types of people. The CONNECTing thread? **Prevention.**

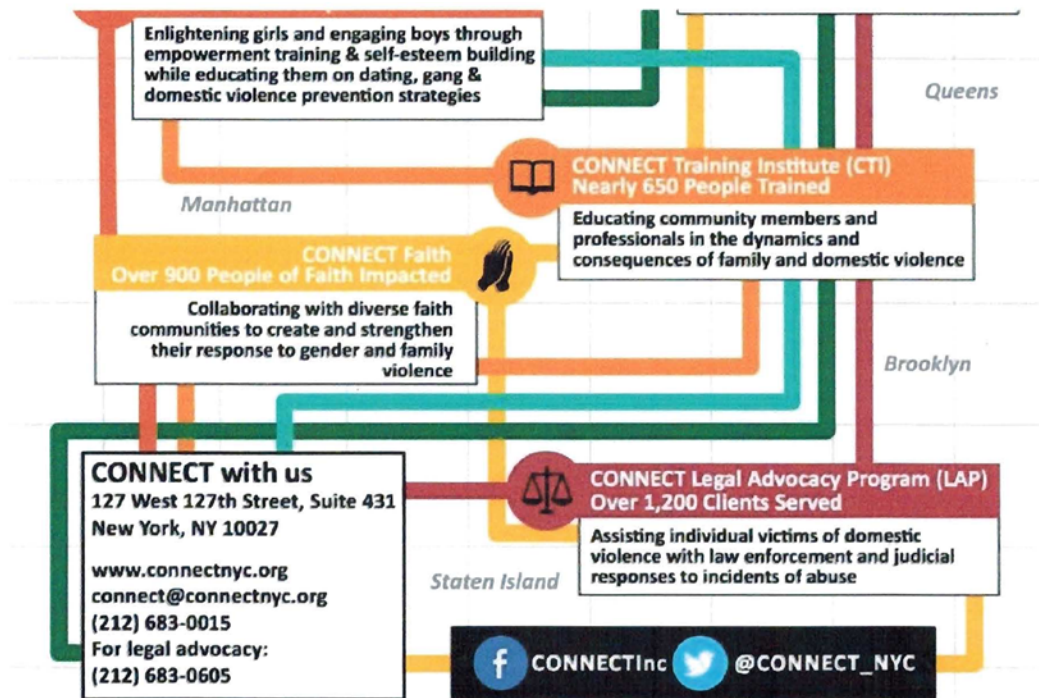
We would like to thank you for your support in making CONNECT an important part of NYC's violence prevention efforts for over 10 years. You have helped us empower, strengthen, and transform families and communities ability to be safe and peaceful.

All of us at CONNECT thank you for your support through this year - and in the year to come.

Thank you for CONNECTing NYC

Here's what we did in 2012-13 (Fiscal Year). You made it possible.





Please share this email so the world knows how you are helping to build a safer, less violent New York City.

SHARE THIS EMAIL

Stay Connected



www.connectnyc.org | 127 W 127th St, Rm 431 | New York, NY 10027 | (212)683-0015

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Connect Inc | 127 West 127th Street | 4th Floor | New York City | NY | 10027

APPENDIX C
MUSLIM CHAPLAINS COMPASSIONATE CARE FLYER

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious and Most Merciful
**AMERICAN ISLAMIC INDIGENOUS
CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION/TRAINING**
All-CPE/T
Presents
MUSLIM CHAPLAINS COMPASSIONATE CARE



PANELIST

MC Shaikh Ismail Abdul Qadir Dr. Aliyah Morgan MD., Dr. Imam Muhammad Hatim PHD.,
Imam Luqman Abdush Shahid, Shaykh T.A. Bashir, Chaplain Fajr Abdul Azeez,
Chaplain Jawad Adbul Wadud, Imam Salihou Djabe

Sunday June 30, 2013 @ 1:00pm – 5:00pm

**African Poetry Theater
176-03 Jamaica Ave. Jamaica, NY 11432**

Ticket Price \$25.00

Contact: Abdus-Salaam Musa, President (347) 407-6828

APPENDIX D

TRAINING CLASS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Imam's Training

House of Peace, Inc.

405 Tarrytown Rd. Suite 1096

White Plains, NY 10607-1407

Facilitator: Shaykh Al Hajj TA Bashir. Email: tabcib@aol.com // House of Peace, Inc. 718 276 6037

Course: Open to women and men of all faiths

Training Description

This training class will be an introduction to Training/class on what the Qur'an says in relation to (DV) to increase awareness, the related constellation effect that DV has on family, pets and other members of the community and an Islamic response to this maladaptive behavior. This approach will include discussions, DVDs, and readings of selected books, articles and materials presented in class. It will also involve examination, hermeneutically, of some of the controversial and misinterpreted verses that are sometimes used to justify beating of one's wife. There are other verses that are used from the sacred texts that are frequently used to justify DV.

Training Goals:

- Provide a basic understanding of the dynamics of DV and ways to provide safety for the victim, their households and their communities.
- To examine some of the excuses used to justify the use of violence.
- What are the parameters of a healthy relationship and what are the opposites of a healthy relationship.
- To provide support and intervention for the victim, children, pets and the abuser accountable, within the parameters of safety.

- Explore some of the issues that DV in relation to the spiritual, theological, pastoral and social. As applied to victims, survivors, abusers, and witnesses as well as Imams and their congregations.
- Develop strategies of intervention for Imams (Ministers) and Masjids (or other religious institutions) can play a critical role in breaking the silence and preventing domestic violence through education.

Classwork:

We will read from Jackson Katz's "Machismo Paradox", Amina Wadud's "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Quranic Analysis", Asma Barlas's Islam and Patriarchy.

There will be 6 Handouts that you read and be read to discuss at our next session.

A Bibliography for extra credit reading will be handed out in the third session.

We will view the following: 1. Closer than a garment. 2. The Chaplains Story 3. The Man's Box and In the Man's Box. 4. The Al Miles Story

We will have advocates come and speak to our class.

This course runs 12 weeks and it has a lot of information to digest lateness and absences will count against you if you do not all at least 8 hours before class

Class Project due at last session.

From your own faith background:

- A) Developing a khutba (sermon) on DV. (Verbally report on a case that you were involved in).
 1. Develop a khutba using parts of the Quran (Bible, etc.) that emphasizes *Equality*.
 2. Include in the verbal recitation verses that emphasize *Justice*.
 3. Do not explain away incidents of abuse but do investigate and evaluate: think safety, safety, and safety.

Or

B) Discuss what you believed prior to the training and what you have learned from the training and how that influenced you or changed your thinking on the subject of DV.

- B) Discuss what measures are necessary to educate your congregation about DV, Bullying among the youth, and safety issues for DV victims. Please discuss your ideas with facilitator.

References

Garments to One Another (DVD with translator.)

Faith Trust Institute.

The Rev Al Miles Story (DVD with translator)

The Institute of DV in the African American Community (IDVAAC)

The Man Box (DVD)

A Call to Men: Tony Page and Ted Bunch

1. The Qur'an and Women by Amina Wadud

2. Patriarchy and the Qur'an by Amina Wadud

The Macho Paradox by Jackson Katz

Wounds of the Spirit by Traci C. West

The Qur'an: A User's Guide by Farid Esack

I Quarter

- a) Safety Issues for victim and children
- b) Counseling the abuser (not alone) establishing accountability
- c) Having the abuser come to terms with the fact that reconciliation is on the women's timetable and not his.

II Quarter: midterm assignment at the end

- a) Muslim DV wheel: presentation and in-depth discussion, different forms of abuse. Wheel of Mutuality and Partnering Behaviors. (H/O)
- b) Presentation of the DVD in the “Man Box” that graphically depict many forms of abuse that passes as “just men’s behaviors” an attempt to minimize or dismiss the behavior as meaningless.
- c) Discussion on the Quranic verse 4:36 that some misinterpret as giving men permission to physically discipline their wives. Copy of Fatwa by Shaykh Kabbani et al, of Afghanistan, evidence and citation for the prohibition of acts of DV against any human being.

III Quarter: Final Project due at the end of the class and presented in class.

- a) Providing khutbahs (sermons) on DV at least 4xs per year.
- b) Instructing young men and women that DV is “haram”
- c) A witness to DV that doesn’t seek an intervention is a passive abuser: explanation and discussion.
- d) DV is a community issue and a severe human rights violation. It is also a crime in the USA that is punishable offense.
- e) Q&A session.

Session IV

- a) Presentation of the DVD “Garments of One Another”.
- b) Q & A session on the presentation.
- c) Review of key issues of DV
- D) General Questions asked on paper to assess how much of the material was absorbed.
- E) End of training *hiz* (party) and picture taking, networking, etc.

APPENDIX E
PASTORAL CARE GUIDELINES

Pastoral Care Guidelines in Response to Survivors of Domestic Violence

Goals for intervention:

- **SAFETY** for survivor & children
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** for the abuser
- **RESTORATION** of individuals and, WHEN APPROPRIATE, relationships
OR
- **MOURNING** loss of the relationships.

Do's and Don'ts for working with survivors of domestic violence:

- DO reassure her that this is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, and it is not God's will for her.
- DO give her referral information; primary resources are battered women's services or shelters and National Hotline. 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) / 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
- DO support and respect her choices. Even if she is aware of the risks and chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive.
- DO encourage her to think about a safety plan. This might include setting aside some money, copies of important papers for her and her children, a change of clothes hidden or in care of friends. It could also include a plan about how to exit the house the next time the abuser is violent, as well as considerations of what to do about the children if they are at school, if they are asleep, etc. Safety planning is an ongoing process that offers practical assistance and also helps her stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence. Battered women's advocates (the hotlines and support groups, both free services) are trained in safety planning – encourage her to use them!
- DO protect her confidentiality. DO NOT give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser. Do not discuss with the parish council/session/elders who might inadvertently pass information on to the abuser. Do not add her name to a prayer chain for any reason.
- DO help her with any religious concerns. If she is Christian, give her a copy of *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*. Refer to www.faithtrustinstitute.org for copies of this book and other helpful information.
- DO assure her of God's love and presence, of your commitment to walk with her through this valley of the shadow of death.

- DO help her see that her partner's violence has broken the marriage covenant and that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.
- If she decides to separate and divorce, DO support her and help her to mourn the loss to herself and her children.
- DO pray with her. Ask God to give her the strength and courage she needs.
- DON'T minimize the danger to her. You can be a reality check. "From what you have told me, I am very much concerned for your safety . . ."
- DON'T tell her what to do. Give information and support.
- DON'T react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what she tells you. But don't react passively, either. Let her know that you are concerned and that what the abuser has done to her is wrong and is not deserved by her.
- DON'T blame her for his violence. If she is blaming herself, try to reframe: "I don't care if you did have supper late or forgot to water the lawn, that is no reason for him to be violent with you. This is his problem."
- DON'T recommend couples' counseling or approach her husband and ask for "his side of the story." These actions will endanger her.
- DON'T recommend "marriage enrichment," "mediation," or a "communications workshop." None of these will address the goals listed above.
- DON'T send her home with just a prayer and directive to submit to her husband, bring him to church, or be a better Christian wife.
- DON'T encourage her to forgive him and take him back.
- DO NOT encourage her dependence on you or become emotionally or sexually involved with her.
- DON'T do nothing.
- DO familiarize yourself with your local resources so that you have specific referrals to give to congregants. Meet with their representatives and know what services they are able to provide. Chief of these is the battered women's hotline and shelter or safe home network. Often the state domestic violence coalition is a best first contact for you.
- DO consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response. Refer to www.faithtrustinstitute.org for resources.

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

Use LOCAL RESOURCES

APPENDIX F HOUSE OF PEACE

HOUSE OF PEACE, Inc. (HOP)

405 Tarrytown Road, suite#1096 (tabeib@aol.com)
White Plains, NY 10607. 718 276 6037 (F) Sam



"Helping People to Help Themselves"

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
O humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a female
and a male, and made you into nations and tribes (genders), that ye may
know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most
honored of you in the sight of Allah (God) is (they who are) the most
righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted
(with all things). Qur'an 49:13

Shaykh TA Bashir as requested by: ConnectNYC: Ending Child Sexual Abuse, March 6th; Peaceful Families, a leading Muslim advocate for gender equality, I was invited to participate in a Domestic Violence (DV) Training for Imams (March 27th-30th) at Herndon, VA.; and The Training by Peaceful Families: Intervening with Clergy who have Sexually Abused March 24th; schedule to train the NY State Chaplains Association on DV Signs and Responses. The programs will evolve around education and discussions about "Cultural Determinants of Abusive Behavior & Sensitivity" and define: "What is "Male Privileges and different forms of DV and What Can Men Do Educate on DV. DVD's may also be used to supplement and to facilitate the defining of DV and Patriarchy in many of its various forms.

The HOP is dedicated to Gender Equality and Safety for woman and children; it also maintains safety for frontline interveners. We provide pre-marital counseling, End of Life Support for those returning to Allah and their families, provides HIV/ AIDS Awareness training. We may be reached by individuals, Masjids and Islamic Organizations, non-profit and corporate entities at the following number 718 276 6037 (phone and fax). Main Office: 914 328 2055. Fax 914 328 0309.

The HOP was formed 9/11 in response to the escalating incidents of abuse in the Muslim Community and transformed to a Multi Faith provider in raising the awareness and consciousness of the entire community.

The HOP was founded by Al Hajj Shaykh Dr. TA Bashir and CEO, who worked 26 years for the State of New York as a Forensic Psychologist in the areas of Sexual Assault and Homicidal Ideations. He is a Gender Equality Advocate by examining the Scriptures of the Abrahamic Faiths in their original language; he has traced these writing and has presented conclusive proof that the misinterpretations of the translators has sent many men down the road of uncompromising entitlement based on an anatomical structure that is not collaborated in religious writings. The Shaykh has concentrated on DV, Batterers' Interventions, Immigration and Multi Faith Work and etc.

HOUSE OF PEACE, Inc, (HOP)

405 Tarrytown Road, suite#1096

White Plains, NY 10607. 718 276 6037 (F) Same



"Helping People to Help Themselves"

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
O humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes (genders), that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (they who are) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).
Qur'an 49:13

The HOP as requested by Peaceful Families, a leading Muslim advocate for gender equality, will participate in a Domestic Violence (DV) Awareness Program for the community at large; at Herndon VA on the 19th of Nov 2013 at 555 Grove St., 8 AM to 1PM.

The program will evolve around education and discussions about "Cultural Sensitivity" and define: "What "Male Privileges and DV". DVD's may also be used to supplement and to facilitate the defining of DV and Patriarchy in many of its various forms.

The HOP is dedicated to Gender Equality and Safety for woman and children; it also maintains safety for frontline interveners. We provide pre-marital counseling, End of Life Support for those returning to Allah and their families, provides HIV/ AIDS Awareness training. We may be reached by individuals, Masjids and Islamic Organizations, non-profit and corporate entities at the following number 718 276 6037 (phone and fax). Main Office: 914 328 2055. Fax 914 328 0309.

House of Peace - Ta Bashir
405 Tarrytown Road
White Plains, NY 10607
Ste 1096 ~~(914) 309-4114~~
Fax 914-328-0309

House of Peace - Ta Bashir
405 Tarrytown Road
White Plains, NY 10607
Ste 1096 ~~(914) 309-4114~~
Fax ~~914-328-0309~~

Shaykh TA Bashir
House of Peace

9 Ways to Collude with Abusive Men

by John Went

The following list reflects some of the most common mistaken beliefs about abusers and their violence:

1. "I actually like him."

Abusive men are likeable. In many ways they are the same as all of us. But it is important to remember that this likeable man exerts his power and control in ways that physically and/or emotionally destroy his family. Liking him can be the first step toward minimizing his abuse.

2. "He's a victim."

Many, if not all, of abusive men have been victimized in their lives. He needs to take responsibility for what he is doing now in order to stop the cycle. By itself, dealing with his own victimization will not stop his abusiveness. Understanding his victim/s will help him stop his abuse and better understand himself.

3. "She's the perpetrator."

His partner may not be a very nice person (or he may paint her that way). Men almost unanimously use this as an excuse for their behavior. No matter what she does, he has no right to abuse her.

4. "He's stressed out."

Stress does not cause abuse. In fact, men who stop trying to control members of their families often report a reduction in stress.

5. "His life stinks. He's being oppressed by (his boss, mother, victim, etc.)"

Oppression is bad. Abuse is bad. We can end oppression by dealing with oppressors, not by abusing those lower in the cultural hierarchy.

6. "If he stops his substance abuse, he will stop his violence."

Substance abuse can dramatically increase the forms abuse takes. However, unless the man is willing to confront his attitudes about power, control, and his family and take concrete steps to redistribute the power in the relationship, he will continue to try to dominate others, even when he is sober.

7. "Anger is an addiction."

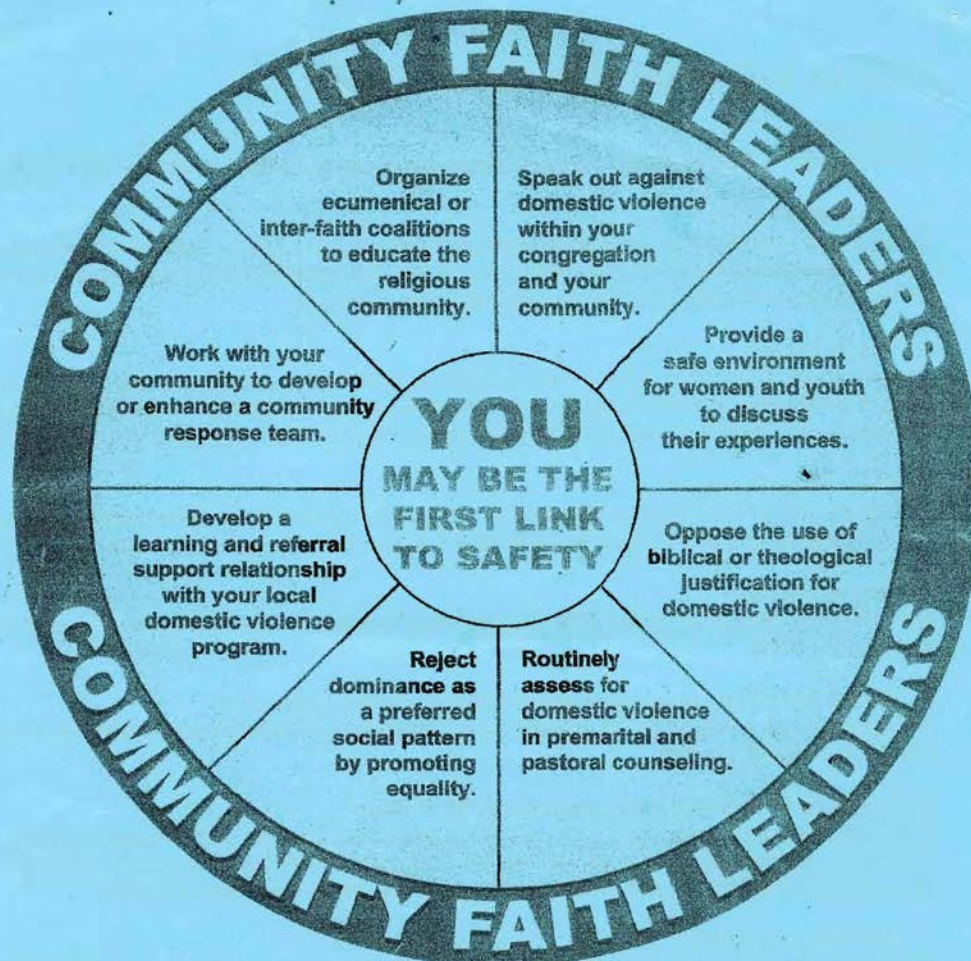
Many men report feeling "high" and find a release of tension when they lose their temper. Although there are physiological components to anger, abusive behavior is a political (power and control) issue. There are many non-abusive ways to deal with tension.

8. "It's a problem in the family system."

Abusive men generally have family issues that need to be dealt with at some point. Abuse maintains an inequity in power in the relationship that cannot be dealt with by seeing the partners as equals. This view can lead to serious safety issues for family members.

9. "He's sorry and he's trying really hard."

The only way to say you're sorry is to end the abuse.



This wheel demonstrates the ideal response of community faith leaders to domestic violence.

UNITED TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Adapted with permission from the "Power & Control and Equality Wheels," developed by Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN.

Provided by:



Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence
220 SW 33rd Street • Topeka, KS 66611
785-232-9784 • FAX: 785-266-1874 • E-Mail: coalition@kcsdv.org

EVALUATION FORM

Please rate the following as:	1- Poor	2- Fair	3- Satisfactory	4- Good	5- Excellent
The workshop met my expectations.					
The workshop met its objectives.					
The concepts were well presented & developed.					
I have a better understanding of the Islamic perspective of domestic violence.					
I have a better understanding of the intersection of culture & religion in Muslim families.					

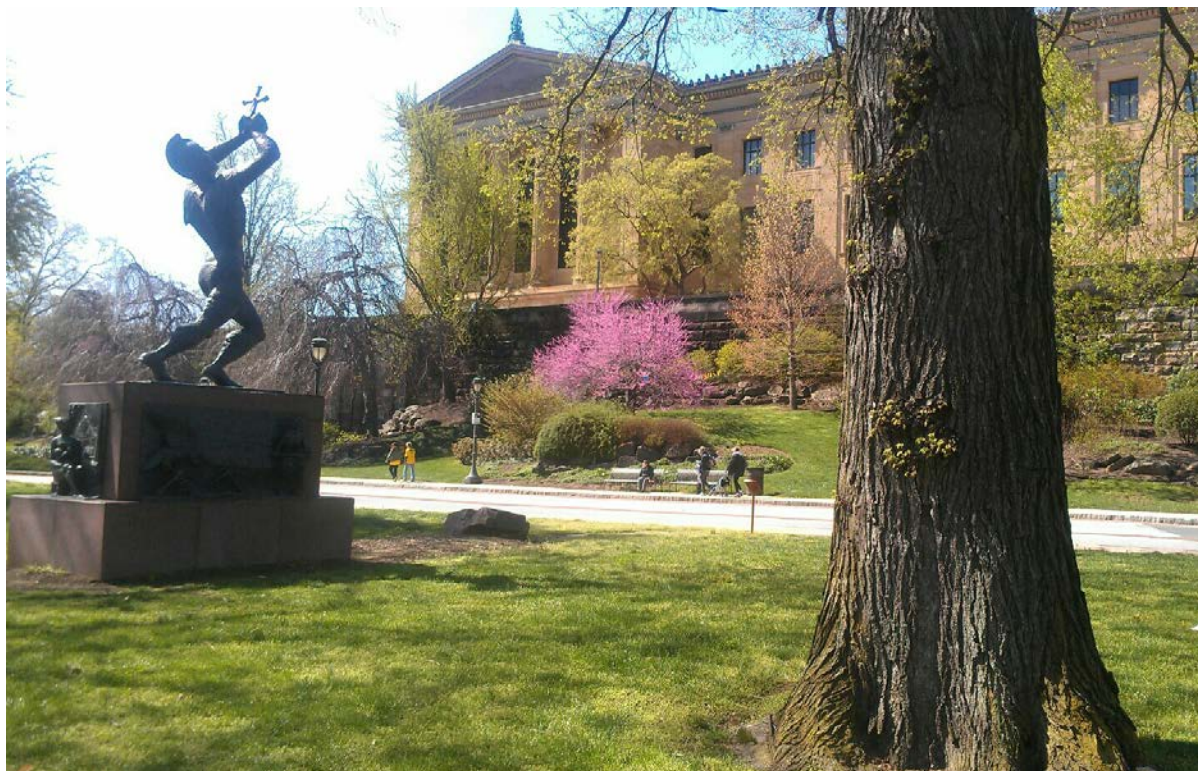
APPENDIX G
BUILDING BRIDGES A MUSLIM-EPISCOPALIAN DIALOGUE
PHOTOGRAPHS



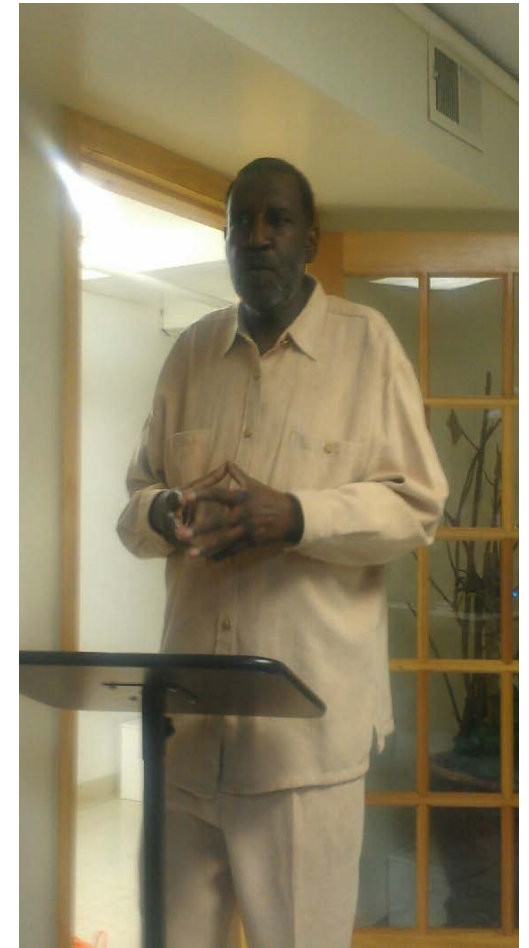
APPENDIX H: MOSQUE



APPENDIX I: HOSPITAL/KIDNEY TRANSPLANT



APPENDIX J: LECTURE SERIES



APPENDIX K: IDVAAC BLOG TALK RADIO

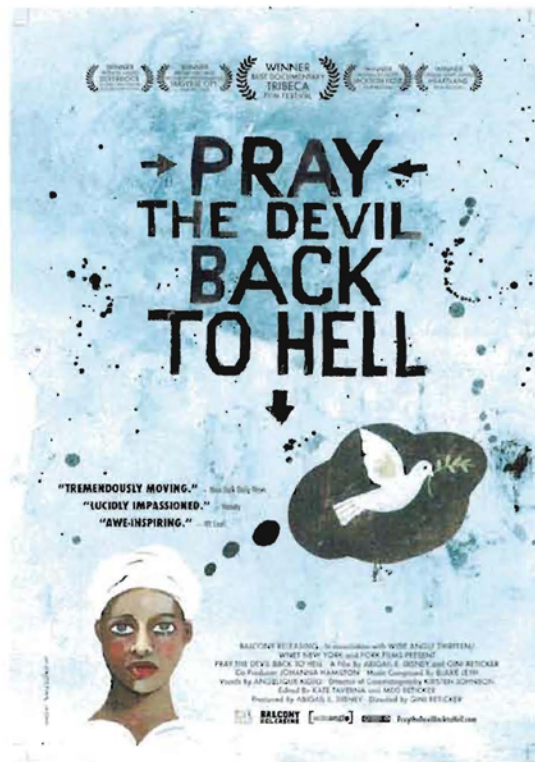


APPENDIX L FATHER'S DAY PLEDGE 2013



APPENDIX M PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL NYTS PEACE
CONFERENCE MAY 25 2013

**FORK
FILMS**
*in association with WNET
presents*



A Film by Abigail E. Disney and Gini Reticker

(USA, 2008, 72 minutes)

www.PraytheDevilBacktoHell.com

New York Press/Publicity
Fork Films
25 E. 21st Street, 7th Floor, NY NY 10010
info@forkfilms.net
(212) 782-3705

Production Company Contact
Juli Kobayashi
Operations Director
Fork Films
25 E. 21st Street, 7th Floor, NY NY 10010
juli@forkfilms.net
(212) 782-3706

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SYNOPSIS

Pray the Devil Back to Hell is the gripping account of a group of brave and visionary women who demanded peace for Liberia, a nation torn to shreds by a decades-old civil war. The women's historic yet unsung achievement finds voice in a narrative that intersperses contemporary interviews, archival images, and scenes of present-day Liberia together to recount the experiences and memories of the women who were instrumental in bringing lasting peace to their country.

ABOUT THE FILM

Pray the Devil Back to Hell is the extraordinary story of a small band of Liberian women who came together in the midst of a bloody civil war, took on the violent warlords and corrupt Charles Taylor regime, and won a long-awaited peace for their shattered country in 2003.

As the rebel noose tightened upon Monrovia, and peace talks faced collapse, the women of Liberia – Christian and Muslims united - formed a thin but unshakable white line between the opposing forces, and successfully demanded an end to the fighting—armed only with white T-shirts and the courage of their convictions.

In one remarkable scene, the women barricaded the site of stalled peace talks in Ghana, and announced they would not move until a deal was done. Faced with eviction, they invoked the most powerful weapon in their arsenal – threatening to remove their clothes. It worked.

The women of Liberia are living proof that moral courage and non-violent resistance can succeed, even where the best efforts of traditional diplomacy have failed.

Their demonstrations culminated in the exile of Charles Taylor and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female head of state, and marked the vanguard of a new wave of women taking control of their political destiny around the world.

This remarkable chapter of world history was on its way to being lost forever. The Liberian war and peace movement were largely ignored as the international press focused on Iraq. Moreover, the women's own modesty helped obscure this great accomplishment.

Pray the Devil Back to Hell reconstructs the moment through interviews, archival footage and striking images of contemporary Liberia. It is compelling testimony to the potential of women worldwide to alter the history of nations.

ABOUT FORK FILMS

Fork Films LLC is a film production company based in New York City founded in 2007 dedicated to the development and production of films that move, inspire and enlighten.

In the belief that film has a unique capacity to shed light, evoke compassion and stir action, Fork Films invests in and creates media that make an important social contribution, with a particular emphasis on material that has been overlooked, people who tend to be underestimated, and stories that have been left out of the mainstream historical record. □□

Fork Films has shared production credits on documentary features such as *Playground* and *Family Affair*, the documentary short *Sun Come Up*, the upcoming film *Return* starring Linda Cardellini and John Slattery, and has a development deal with director Deborah Kampmeier (*Hound Dog*).

Pray the Devil Back to Hell was Fork Film's first production.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

By Gini Reticker

When Abby Disney first approached me to direct *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, I had some trepidation. All the stories coming out of Liberia had been so bleak, the violence against women appalling, the forced conscription of child soldiers heart-wrenching. I wondered if I could immerse myself in that material for the length of time it takes to make a documentary. And then, we met Leymah Gbowee, one of the main characters portrayed in the film. All of my trepidation turned instantly into unfettered enthusiasm. I couldn't believe how fortunate I was to be able to tell the extraordinary story of these women who had joined together to bring peace to their devastated country. Their remarkable accomplishment had been virtually ignored by the press and was on its way to being forgotten. Being part of ensuring that their story shines has been an absolute privilege.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The story of the Liberian women who joined together to demand peace for their shattered country was very nearly forgotten in favor of the history written by Liberia's warlords.

In 2006 Abigail Disney traveled to Liberia [with the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government] in the hopes of offering whatever support she could to the first woman elected head of state in Africa, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Abigail had spent many years working in support of women's political leadership out of a belief that the world has been managed by only half of its inhabitants for too long.

While she was in Liberia she heard a snippet of the story from a woman in conversation. The woman referred to it in passing, assuming that Abigail already knew about it. It sounded like something significant, but the moment passed so quickly Abigail wasn't sure she had heard her right. Later, it happened again with another woman. And again. And again.

Abigail returned to New York haunted by the story. She told the story to director Gini Reticker and they wondered whether it would make a good film. Then they met Leymah Gbowee. Leymah was so magnetic and compelling, the two women knew at once that the film must be made. In December of that year, Abigail and Gini returned to Liberia to corroborate the story and to do some preliminary filming.

They met with the core group of women who had organized the peace rallies. As they listened to the women's heartbreaking personal anecdotes, they knew the story had to be told in their voice, from their point of view, with no narration.

Everywhere they went people repeated the same story. So it had happened but was

there footage to prove it? After all, all the major news outlets had been in Liberia during the turmoil in the summer of 2003.

A busy period of pre-production in New York turned up a few still photographs but only five minutes of footage of the women. After conducting interviews with Leymah Gbowee and Vaiba Flomo in New York, the team left for Liberia in May 2007 to begin principal photography still unsure whether or not the story work visually.

Filming in Liberia was a challenge. It is a country trying its best to recover from 20 years of brutal war. The number of recently demobilized, unemployed soldiers made security a concern. And most of the country, including the capital city Monrovia, was without electricity.

For all the difficulties the rewards were numerous. For starters, everyone in Liberia knew about the women in white and were prepared to do anything to help.

One of the most critical moments was finding a cameraman who had worked for President Sirleaf, and her two predecessors. He arrived at the hotel with footage of the women meeting then-President Charles Taylor. It became one of the most important moments in the whole film!

After that, there was much digging around, and asking people to look and look again for any footage of the women in action. There were hours and hours of footage of child soldiers, of dead and mutilated bodies, of mass burials, and very little of the women. Piece by piece, through many individual cameramen in Liberia, different non-governmental organizations, and news agencies from all over the world, archive material started trickling in.

Back home after principal photography, in the edit room, the trickiest question was how much of Liberia's conflict-plagued past to tell so that viewers would understand the scale of the horrors the women had seen that drove them to act in the decisive way they did. In the end, simplicity prevailed. It wasn't necessary to explain twenty years of war; instead the focus needed to be the women and how they became the conscience of their country, the moral compass in a place that had lost its way.

The film was finished in the days running up to its premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival in April 2008 where it won the Jury Prize for Best Documentary. President Sirleaf attended a screening, and enthused to the audience afterwards that the film would make a major contribution and hopefully prevent other countries from slipping into chaos.

The highlight, though, was screening the film to 300 women in Monrovia immediately after Tribeca. Afterwards the women were proud to say, "You see what we did. Now the world will know."

A NOTE ON LIBERIA'S HISTORY

People have been living in the dense rain forest along the coast of West Africa for hundreds of years, perhaps thousands. Mostly, they lived in small farming communities.

From the fifteenth century Europeans bought slaves there, at first for use in Europe, and later for their American and Caribbean colonies.

The destiny of this one small area soon became closely intertwined with that of the USA. In 1816, some influential Americans established the American Colonization Society, to encourage free persons of color living in the USA to settle in Africa. In 1822, a small group of African-Americans settled in an area they called Liberia. Twenty-five years later, the settlers proclaimed themselves to constitute the Republic of Liberia.

Liberia's coastal settlements were home to citizens, mostly of American origin, with full civil rights. As the descendants of unfree people, they were proud of their little republic. They believed they had a mission from God to civilize the African natives under their rule. The great majority of Liberia's population, meanwhile, lived under colonial-style rule.

The Republic of Liberia was weak and penniless until the 1920s, when the Firestone Company identified Liberia as ideal for growing rubber. The government started to receive income from taxes and royalties from foreign investment. After World War Two, the economy grew very fast as mining and agricultural companies invested. A small elite lived well from its foreign connections while the mass of the population, the 'country people', whose ancestors had never lived anywhere but Africa, got little benefit. In fact, traditional forms of government became more despotic as the Republic of Liberia supported those strong men it favored in the interior.

Yet, in the middle of the twentieth century, Liberia enjoyed a high reputation among black people in America. It had the prestige of being a republic ruled by Africans at a time when almost all of Africa was under colonial rule. It was only after other African countries became independent that Liberia lost its mystique. When this combined with economic problems in the 1970s, the whole base on which the Republic of Liberia was founded started to crack. In 1980 there was a military coup. A chaotic and brutal government paved the way for the civil war that lasted on and off from 1989 to 2003.

The Liberian war became a by-word for casual brutality. Most Liberians were sick of it long before the end came, as rebel armies backed by foreign governments attacked the government of Charles Taylor, the warlord elected to the presidency in 1997. Liberian women called for peace — they prayed for the devil of war to get back to Hell. After 2003, the United Nations stabilized the country.

(A NOTE ON LIBERIA'S HISTORY CONTINUED)

Liberia is now headed by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. She is popular among Liberians and respected abroad. She has been able to get international support to build the country, even while many of the old problems remain. A generation of people shaped by violence is now entering middle age, often with no jobs and few prospects. The war has gone, but the future remains uncertain.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Gini Reticker (Director) is one of the world's leading documentary filmmakers putting a lens on the real-life dramatic stories of women's rights and international social justice issues.

Reticker is currently a co-creator and executive producer of ***Women, War & Peace***, a new 5-part series which uncovers the untold stories of women's strategic role in global conflict and peacemaking, which premieres on Tuesday, October 11 at 10pm on PBS. ***Pray the Devil Back to Hell*** is part two of the series and she also directed the third film in the series about Afghanistan, ***Peace Unveiled***.

Reticker produced ***Asylum***, the 2004 Academy Award®-nominated short focusing on the story of a Ghanaian woman who fled female genital mutilation to seek political asylum in the U.S.; and was the producer/co-director of 1994 Sundance Award-winning ***Heart of the Matter***, the first full length documentary about the impact of HIV on women in the U.S. She produced and directed the 2005 Emmy Award-winning documentary ***Ladies First*** for the PBS series WIDE ANGLE, which focuses on the role of women in rebuilding post-genocide Rwanda. She also garnered an Emmy for directing and producing ***Out of the Darkness***, focusing on women and depression. For WIDE ANGLE she has also directed ***The Class of 2006***, which spotlights the first fifty women in Morocco to graduate from an imam academy in Rabat.

Other credits include: Producer: ***A Decade Under the Influence***, a look at the heyday of 1970s filmmakers, winner of a National Review Board Award and an Emmy nomination for Best Documentary; Director: ***In the Company of Women***, IFC's spotlight on women in Hollywood; Co-Producer: ***The Betrayal, Nerakhoon***, Ellen Kuras and Thavisouk Phravasath's brilliant portrayal of a Laotian refugee family's epic tale of survival and resilience, 2009 nominee for both an Academy Award and Independent Spirit Award; Executive Producer: ***Live Nude Girls Unite***, Julia Query and Vicki Funari's raucous look at the successful union organizing efforts of San Francisco-based strippers. Reticker is member of both the Directors Guild of America and the Writers Guild of America.

Abigail E. Disney (Producer) is a filmmaker and philanthropist. She is currently a co-creator and executive producer of **Women, War & Peace**, a new 5-part series which uncovers the untold stories of women's strategic role in global conflict and peacemaking, which premieres on Tuesday, October 11 at 10pm on PBS. **Pray the Devil Back to Hell** is part two of the series, and Abigail was also the writer on **Peace Unveiled**, the third film in the series about Afghanistan.

Her longtime passion for women's issues and peacebuilding led her to producing films. She has executive produced films that address various social issues, including **Family Affair**, **Playground**, **Sun Come Up** (Academy Award® Nominee 2011, Best Documentary Short) and **Return**, and is involved in several more films in various stages of development and production.

Disney, also, along with her husband, Pierre Hauser, co-founded the Daphne Foundation, which works with low-income communities in the five boroughs of New York City. Her work in philanthropy, women's engagement and leadership, and conflict resolution has been recognized through the Epic Award from the White House Project, the Changing the Landscape for Women Award from the Center for the Advancement of Women, and the prestigious International Advocate for Peace (IAP) Award from the Cardozo Law School's Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution.

In addition, Disney holds degrees from Yale, Stanford, and Columbia. She has been a judge at the Tribeca Film Festival, sits on the advisory board of ITVS's groundbreaking initiative, Women and Girls Lead, and is a sought-after public speaker. She frequently travels around the country and across the globe to deliver keynote addresses, commencement speeches and lectures, and has participated in panels in diverse locations such as The Hague, Davos, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and at dozens of universities and community centers. She is a member of the Writers Guild of America.

Kirsten Johnson's (Director of Photography) most recent film, **Deadline**, (co-directed with Katy Chevigny), premiered at Sundance in 2004 and was one of the first independent documentaries to be acquired by a major network (NBC). Her previous documentary as a director, **Innocent Until Proven Guilty** premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and was broadcast on HBO in 1999.

As a cinematographer, she has worked with directors such as Raoul Peck, Barbara Kopple, Michael Moore, and Kirby Dick. Her cinematography is featured in **Fahrenheit 9/11**, Academy and Emmy Award-nominated **Asylum**, Emmy-winning **Ladies First**, and Sundance premiere documentaries, **This Film is Not Rated**, **American Standoff**, and **Derrida**.

A solo show of her still photography, "Cabinet of Curiosity" was exhibited at The Miami Museum of Science, and a chapter is dedicated to her work in the recently published book, "The Art of the Documentary." She has traveled and worked extensively in 13 countries throughout Africa and 38 countries around the world.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Ms. Leymah Roberta Gbowee
Women's Rights Peace Activist
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 2011

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Leymah Gbowee (pronounced LAY—mah, BEAU-wee) was a 17 year-old girl when the war first came to Monrovia. As she says, she turned, "from a child into an adult in a matter of hours." As the war dragged on, Leymah had difficulty focusing on anything but her thwarted opportunities to go to college, and out of bitterness she dodged any political or social involvement. But as time wore on she came to see that it would be up to the citizens of Liberia, especially its women, to bring the country back from the insanity of civil war. She trained as a trauma counselor and worked with the ex-child soldiers of Taylor's army. The more she worked with them the more she came to see that they were too were victims.

Ms. Gbowee joined the Woman in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and quickly rose to leadership thanks to her leadership and organizing skills. She brought all the women of the Christian Churches together into a group called the Christian Women's Initiative and began issuing a series of calls for peace. Soon she formed a coalition with the women in the Muslim organizations in Monrovia and eventually Liberian Mass Action for Peace came into being. Under Leymah's leadership the group managed to force a meeting with Charles Taylor and extract a promise from him to attend peace talks in Ghana. She then led a delegation of Liberian women to Ghana to continue to apply pressure on the warring factions during the peace process.

Ms. Gbowee is the author of her new memoir, [*Mighty Be Our Powers*](#), a gripping chronicle of a journey from hopelessness to empowerment that will touch all who dream of a better world. *Mighty Be Our Powers* is co-authored by Carol Mithers, published by [Beast Books](#).

Leymah has spoken publically numerous times on the issue of women in conflict situations. She was a panelist at several regional and international conferences, including UNIFEM's "Women and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation (DDRR) Process," and the United Nations Security Council's Arria Formula Meeting on women, peace, and security.

Leymah has been honored by multiple organizations, most recently with the [2011 Nobel Peace Prize](#) along with Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Tawakkul Karman. She has been awarded the Blue Ribbon for Peace by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and in May 2009 she accepted the [John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award®](#) on behalf of her countrywomen. A selected list of honors:

- Recipient of the **2011 Nobel Peace Prize**
- Recipient of the **2010 John Jay Medal for Justice** from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- Recipient of **2010 1st Centenary Award** presented by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)
- Recipient of the **Living Legends Award** by the Emmanuel Brinklow Seventh Day Adventist Church in 2010
- Recipient of the **2009 Gruber Prize** for Women's Rights
- Recipient of the **2009 John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award**
- Recipient of the **Women's eNews 2008 Leaders for the 21st Century Award**

She is a member of African Feminist Forum and the African Women's Leadership Network on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, and is the [Newsweek Daily Beast's](#) Africa columnist.

A Social Worker by profession, Leymah has for over ten years been a Case Worker and Peacebuilding Practitioner. As a Case Worker; she worked with the Ministry of Health Displaced Shelter as a Counsellor for refugees from September 1995 to March 1996, LCL/LWF/WS Trauma Programme from May 1998 to March 2003.

Ms. Gbowee is presently the founder and executive director for [Women, Peace and Security Network Africa \(WIPSEN-A\)](#) a women-focused, women-led Pan-African Non-Governmental Organization with the core mandate to promote women's strategic participation and leadership in peace and security governance in Africa. She holds a MA in Conflict Transformation from Eastern Mennonite University. She is the mother of six and resides in Accra, Ghana.

Etweda "Sugars" Cooper **Secretary General Of Liberian Women's Initiative**

Etweda "Sugars" Cooper is one of the doyennes of the Liberian women's movement and is known for speaking out. In 1994, during one of the darkest hours of the civil war in Liberia, she and other women -- tired of being victimized and frustrated at the stalemate in the peace process -- founded the Liberia Women Initiative to advocate for disarmament and free and fair elections, and also to bring pressure to bear on stakeholders for the inclusion of women in negotiating a settlement of the Liberian conflict.

Throughout 14 years of civil war she used mass action including picketing, sit-ins and marches involving grassroots and professional women and their groups to attract world attention to the plight of women and children and to urge the international community to take action to end the war. As a strategist for the Liberian Women peace activities under the auspices of Women In Peace building Network, WIPNET, Sugars was unrelenting in lobbying factional leaders through visits, dialoguing and pleading with them to resolve the stalemate in the Accra Peace Talks in 2003, urging them to agree to a ceasefire and to constitute a transitional government.

Vaiba Flomo**President of the Christian Women's Peace Initiative**

Vaiba Flomo (pronounced VAH-bah FLOH-moh) was working with the Lutheran church's trauma healing program when Leymah came to intern with the program and the two quickly became good friends. Vaiba, haunted by the constant reminders of war -- children dying from hunger or being abandoned because their parents couldn't feed them -- began to press Leymah to mobilize the women of Liberia because as she says "there's not a single woman in Liberia who will tell you that she doesn't have pain from the crisis."

Together with Leymah they worked to bring the Christian and Muslim women's groups together. Where there was some initial reluctance to engage with the other faith, Vaiba developed the message: "can the bullet pick and choose? Does the bullet know Christian from Muslim?" Reluctance faded into action, and the women began their campaign.

To this day, Vaiba works with victims of trauma. And she marvels at what the women managed to achieve: "sometimes when I really think on the work I'm like 'wow, just two little country African girls' dream has become so big'."

Asatu Bah Kenneth was a police officer for 25 years - since before the war began. As the president of the Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association, Asatu was invited to the first meeting of WIPNET and then to the launch of the Christian Women's Initiative. She was so moved by what she heard that she stood up and pledged to mobilize the Muslim women of Liberia to help bring peace to Liberia. And she did, creating the Liberian Muslim Women's Organization. Liberian Mass Action for Peace came into being when the two organizations joined. It was the first time Christian and Muslim women had worked together in Liberia. Asatu's position in the police service gave her access to intelligence about the war. On one occasion, as the war was closing in on Monrovia, Asatu called a meeting with Leymah, Sugars and Janet and other key members of WIPNET. After that meeting the women issued the all-important position statement that they would eventually take to their meeting with Charles Taylor urging him to sit down at the peace table with the rebels.

Her nickname is the "stabilizer" because she doesn't take sides. After the war she became Liberia's Deputy Chief of Police and focused on bringing more women into the security sector. Recently she was appointed the Assistant Minister of Justice for Administration and Public Safety. She is proud to be part of the international peace-building community.

Etty Weah, was one of the hundreds of ordinary women who became involved with WIPNET and the Liberian Mass Action for Peace. She was one of the many women who wore white and sat on the field day in and day out. Rain or shine. Bullets or no

bullets.

Before the war, she used to sell food in front of her house in one of the suburbs of Monrovia. As a regular church goer she responded to a call from the Christian Women's Initiative to become involved in Liberian Mass Action for Peace, and got to know Leymah. She was moved to attend the meeting because she deemed all Liberian women to be victims and thought there was strength in numbers if their voices were to ever be heard. As the war drew closer to Monrovia, and as the mother of two boys, she also feared for all the children who would be conscripted.

Janet Johnson Bryant was a journalist. Much of the time she worked for the Catholic radio station, Radio Veritas in Monrovia. Her beat was the Executive Mansion, occupied by Charles Taylor, who had a virtual stranglehold over the media. Journalists were often openly bribed during press conferences. She also hosted a radio show about women's issues. Bryant's efforts to expose corruption during Taylor's regime earned her the nickname "Iron Lady of Media."

Janet met the women of WIPNET when she reported on them for a story. She soon became part of their outreach and advocacy program. Like Asatu, she used her position to garner important, strategic information that benefited WIPNET. In particular, Janet helped launch the Liberian Mass Action for Peace. Together with Leymah, Sugars and Asatu she helped draft the first press release calling for an immediate ceasefire and for all warring factions to sit down at the peace table. Janet then broadcast the message announcing the first meeting of the women in the field opposite Taylor's house – hundreds of women showed up and stayed.

She now lives in Dracut, MA, working towards a new goal: earning a master's degree in international diplomacy and returning to Liberia.

WHAT CRITICS SAY ABOUT *PRAY*

Uplifting, disheartening, inspiring, enraging -- the mind reels while watching the documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*.

- *Manohla Dargis / New York Times*

One of the truly heartening international political stories of recent years.

- *Kenneth Turan / LA Times*

Had the stakes not been so harrowing, the moment would have been comic. Instead, it proved cathartic.

- *Bob Mondello / NPR*

Pray the Devil Back to Hell is powerful enough to make even the most cynical believe in the ability of ordinary people to induce political change.

- *Frank Scheck / Hollywood Reporter*

The heroism on view in the documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* is breathtaking.

- *Peter Rainer / Christian Science Monitor*

Not so long ago, Liberia was a hopeless basket case, and now thanks to a hitherto unheralded army of women volunteers, there is hope, at least in Liberia.

- *Andrew Sarris / New York Observer*

Pray the Devil Back to Hell is a potent reminder of what power in numbers can accomplish.

- *David Fear / Time Out New York*

A testament to the determination and wisdom of a group of Liberian women who banded together in 2003 to stop a civil war and bring peace to their West African nation, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* is at once inspiring and horrific.

- *Stephen Rea / Philadelphia Inquirer*

WHERE TO SEE PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL

Home DVD

The film was released on home DVD in on October 15, 2009, available on the *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* website for \$24.95, which includes a \$5 donation to Peace is Loud (www.peaceisloud.org). The website exclusively offers a PAL version for international sales. The Home DVD is also available in select retail stores in the U.S. for a SRP of \$24.95 including Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, and many more. Passion River is the film's non-exclusive U.S. retail distributor. The Home DVD is also available in selected international markets.

Educational & Public Viewing

Those who wish to host a screening or license the film for educational or public use may purchase the specially licensed DVD through Ro*Co Educational available at www.rocoeducational.com.

U.S. Broadcast

Pray the Devil Back to Hell will have its U.S. broadcast premiere on Tuesday, October 18, 2011 on PBS (10p.m. ET) as part two of "Women, War & Peace" produced by WNET and Fork Films.

International

Ro*Co Films (www.rocofilms.com) handles international rights for *Pray the Devil Back to Hell's*, and the film has been licensed in over a dozen territories (for broadcast, online streaming, home DVD, theatrical release, etc) including Asia Pacific, Australia, Brazil, the U.K., Japan, France, Norway, Sweden, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland.

Film Festivals

PDBH continues to be booked in film festivals around the world.

DISTRIBUTION AND IMPACT OF PDBH

Pray the Devil Back to Hell premiered on April 24, 2008 at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York, playing to packed houses and standing ovations where it was awarded the jury prize for Best Documentary. The film has screened in over 60 film festivals since then, and has been honored with numerous awards, including the Witness Award at Silverdocs, the Audience Award at Jackson Hole, Best Documentary at the Heartland Film Festival, and the Gabriel Award. (A complete list of awards follows in this press kit).

The film opened in theaters in November 2008 and played to positive reviews in over 40 cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Washington DC, San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago.

After its successful theatrical run, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* brought its message of peace and inspiration to even more communities worldwide during its Global Peace Tour, spearheaded by Film Sprout (www.filmsprout.org). The nine month public

screenings campaign designed to peak on the United Nations' 2009 International Day of Peace (September 21, 2009) brought the film to 235 American cities, 45 states, and 31 foreign countries, and reached at least 31,200 individual viewers in public, campus, or community venues. A list of past screenings can be viewed on the website at www.praythedevilbacktohell.com.

Pray the Devil Back to Hell has screened in all 7 continents, and in 60 countries for women, men of all walks of life, from students and average citizens in small rural areas as well as in major cities, for people in conflict regions around the world, for peace activists, and for dignitaries and politicians who make or influence the policies that drive conflict.

Pray the Devil Back to Hell also had the honor of being the first film ever to be shown at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2009.

More information about the film can be found on the website at www.praythedevilbacktohell.com. A comprehensive distribution and impact report can be requested by emailing info@forkfilms.net.

COMPLETE AWARDS LIST

AWARDS - WON (in chronological order)

Best Documentary Feature
Tribeca Film Festival, April 2008

Cowboy Award Winner – Audience Choice Award
Jackson Hole Film Festival, June 2008

Witness Award
Silverdocs AFI/Discovery Channel Film Festival, June 2008

Special Jury Prize for Non-Fiction Filmmaking
Traverse City Film Festival, August 2008

Crystal Heart Award for Best Documentary Feature
Heartland Film Festival, October 2008

Best Documentary in the Interfaith Category
St. Louis International Film Festival, November 2008

My Media Award
The 4th Annual MY HERO Film Festival, November 2008

"Blessed Are the Peacemakers" Awards
presented by U.S. Conference for the World Council of Churches (WCC), December 2008

Jury Award / Best Film Award
(won jointly by "Pray The Devil Back to Hell" and "The Sari Soldiers")
Tri Continental Film Festival, January 2009

Best of the Fest Selection
Palm Springs International Film Festival, January 2009

Social Justice Award for Documentary Film
Santa Barbara International Film Festival, February 2009

The Cinema for Peace Award for Justice
Cinema for Peace, February 2009

Rudolf Vrba Award in the Right to Know Competition
One World International Human Rights Festival, Prague, March 2009

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